

## FRIDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2009

The Speaker, Rt. Hon Sir Peter Kenilorea took the Chair at 09.49 am.

Prayers.

### ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Planning & Aid Coordination; Justice & Legal Affairs; Foreign Affairs & External Trade; Commerce, Industry & Employment; National Unity, Reconciliation & Peace; Lands, Housing and Survey; Agriculture & Livestock Development; Police, National Security and Correctional Services and the Members for East Are Are, Temotu Pele, West Are Are, South Vella La Vella, Lau/Mbaelelea, East Makira, West Honiara, North West Guadalcanal and Malaita Outer Islands.

### **STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

**Mr Speaker:** Before we go on to our next business on today's Order Paper, I have received request by the Honorable Member for North West Choiseul, Deputy Speaker to raise a matter of privilege and permission has been granted.

**Mr KENGAVA:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me leave to move this statement on a matter of privilege this morning.

Sir, I thank you for granting me permission under Standing Order 25 to rise and draw the attention of this Parliament on a matter, I believe, is affecting the privilege of Parliament.

Sir, with due respect to my colleague Members of Parliament of which I did not consult nor collectively discuss with, I wish to independently raise my concern over the Parliamentary Entitlement Commission's award of the \$50,000 terminal grant to spouses of Members of Parliament. Therefore, in raising this matter I know that I am open to both criticism and support in the Chamber.

Sir, whilst I agree and support the fact that Parliament Members' spouses do suffer and bear the political pressures and pains experienced by their husbands in their homes together with their children, I believe the fact remains that the spouses are not elected deputy members of Parliament thus required to be covered under the Parliamentary Entitlement Regulations for terminal grant.

Mr Speaker, also whilst I appreciate the fact that it is fair and justified to recognize the support rendered by Parliament Members' spouses in their never

ending provision of domestic assistance to constituents and the public at home, it is not right and proper to drag the innocent ladies into the political arena of Parliament and bring them to question just because of an award they did not ask for.

Sir, no one refuses money but for Members of Parliament it is a privilege that one is entitled to. Yet, when that privilege is extended to a member's spouse, it will have a long term effect of negative attitude from the very people that the Members of Parliament want to represent and to serve, and that is people in the constituencies.

Voters will be more troubling to the innocent spouses at home asking for more monies, foods, sea fares etc. treating our innocent ladies back in the houses as if they are Members of Parliament. As a result, no doubt the Member could become more concerned with domestic affairs than ones parliamentary obligations. To that effect, we now can see that public perception of this particular terminal grant is already raising negative opinions and we must take note of the views of our voters and our people. The debate is already running high on the media and if we take the situation for granted we are not doing justice to the innocent spouses who are now becoming public targets. Unavoidably, the Parliament is now under negative scrutiny and I believe our privilege as peoples' representatives is also coming under question. The decision made by the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission is having an effect on parliament privileges.

Sir, I see this award also as a possible destruction to recognizing the fine leadership qualities that we Members of Parliament do have in the many good deliberations we make in this Chamber. We are at the moment expecting many more important bills for deliberation in this meeting such as the expected Federal Constitution, the Political Party Integrity Bill, two constitutional amendments bill now on notice, just to name some. The question is how comfortable are we in deliberating national issues when the public is questioning an award that is already questioning our integrity as decision makers. I therefore wish to state that the terminal grant awarded to spouses of Parliament Members as untimely, lacks proper consultation and needs submission from Members of Parliament. I cannot recall myself making any submission to the review of the 2009 Parliamentary Entitlements Regulations, and that is why I raise this matter independently. Sir, I do not recall also making any submission to review the 2009 Parliamentary Entitlements Regulations. In my view, the Commission's decision is affecting the privilege of this Parliament and putting all of us under question, not forgetting the uneasiness our families would be having as public debate on this issue increases.

To conclude, I suggest the award made by the Commission be reviewed by the Parliamentary House Committee under Standing Order 70 of the Parliament Standing Orders. The review should be with the objective to advise the Commission to withdraw the terminal grant of \$50,000 awarded to spouses of Parliament Members. Instead the House Committee should deliberate on a more respectable and acceptable ways to recognize and reward financially the services rendered by our spouses every day to our constituents in our homes. The reward need not necessarily be in the Parliamentary Entitlement Regulations.

An avenue that could be looked into is to provide salaries to spouses as non as established workers or award exgratia payment or honorary allowance. But as non elected Members of Parliament, I am of the view that our spouses are not entitled to terminal grants.

Sir, I have no pleasure in raising this matter under Standing Order 25, however, I would defeat my conscience if I remain silent because I believe that privileges of Parliament must be given the respect it requires of us. I thank you for your permission and the privilege given to me to raise this concern on the floor of this Parliament. With that, Mr Speaker, I resume my seat.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Hon SIKUA:** Mr Speaker, I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

**Mr OTI:** Point of order. Standing Order 25 does not permit any questions or any debate as opposed to statements by Ministers.

I just want to raise a point of order here on Standing Order 25(4) where a Member may without notice move a motion based on the matter of privilege under that particular Standing Order, particularly for Parliament to resolve that the matter be referred to the House Committee on what the Honorable Deputy Speaker has raised. We can invoke Standing Order 25(4) so that Parliament resolves that the matter be referred to the House Committee and therefore as a matter of urgency that a motion be moved under Standing Order 25(4) so that what the Deputy Speaker has stated could be referred to and become an immediate matter for the House Committee to look into as opposed to just informally expecting the House Committee to consider this particular matter. I just wish to raise that point of order as to allow your ruling on the issue. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you Honorable Member for Temotu Nende. I am aware of Standing Order 25(4) and I was half expecting that someone might jump up to

actually move a motion so that we can dispose of it the way it has been suggested. Are you now suggesting that you have a motion to move?

**Mr Oti:** Mr Speaker, I do not have one right now but I can quickly come up with one and move that Parliament resolves that the Parliamentary House Committee considers and reviews the decision of the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission in as far as 2009 awards are concerned without going for a motion.

**Mr Speaker:** I think the Commission is an Independent Commission, it decides independently on the issue, but maybe a word to refer this particular decision to the House Committee would be quite in order, in my view. I suppose a motion along that line rather than what you have just said. I do not think we should subject the decision of the independent commission to Parliament. That was the reason why Parliament decided in 1983 to diverse itself of this responsibility to an independent commission. If you want the matter of the matter of privilege raised by the Honorable Member be referred to the House Committee then that would be in order in my view.

**Mr Oti:** Mr Speaker, that is well taken and therefore I will not amend it but perhaps move a motion accordingly that the Parliament resolves that the Parliamentary House Committee considers the matter raised by the Deputy Speaker under Standing Order 25(4) and so it leaves no reference to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission, but it basically puts it that Parliament resolves that the House Committee considers the matter that has been raised by the Deputy Speaker under Standing Order 25.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you very much. I think that is quite in order and under Standing Order 26 permission is granted so that requisite notice time is being excused and we can discuss the motion now.

**Mr Oti:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. In moving this motion I am cognizant of the vitality and the urgency and the need for Parliament to look into this particular issue basically because although as we all know the independence of the Commission, this decision cannot be subject to any direction by any authority or any individual it does indeed affect the privileges of Parliament in so far as the uneasiness whereby Parliament is made to debate on important issues which unfortunately are hanging over the heads of Members of Parliament is something which the Parliament itself has no responsibility over. Therefore, we have a right to perhaps share, all Members of Parliament to share our views on this issue.

Whilst I would not like to make particular reference to the powers of the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission, Section 69 of the Constitution, in particular Section 69(b)(iii)?, whereby in amending the regulations or considering all the submissions made by the Commission, the Commission indeed has power under that particular section of the Constitution to consider in relation to parliamentarians and their families on matters regarding their accommodation during Parliament Meeting, housing, medical treatment, internal transport, external transport and so on and so forth. These are matters within the competence of the Commission. However, the particular section of the Constitution also makes reference that whilst making its deliberations and considerations, the Commission must take into account the financial and economic situation of the country and therefore this needs to be taken together and be mindful of the issues which could, if not properly addressed, affect the privileges of Members of Parliament as pointed out by the Deputy Speaker when raising this matter under Standing Order 25.

Mr Speaker, it is also within the terms of reference of the House Committee under Standing Order 70 that the House Committee can consider issues that affects, not only the personal effects of parliamentarians but also facilities under which Parliament Members operate under. So it is quite in order that this matter, particularly the concern that has been raised by the Deputy Speaker under Matters of Privilege on Standing Order 25 could be further explored and examined by the House Committee.

Although the House Committee has no influence, as I have said, over the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission, at least Parliament itself invokes all the constitutional provisions not to allow its integrity to be put into question, both collectively and individually as we represent the people of this country.

With those few comments, Mr Speaker, I beg to move. Thank you.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you honorable Member. The motion before the House is on the subject of matters of privilege raised by the Honorable Member for West North Choiseul this morning be referred to the House Committee for further consideration. Any speakers?

**Mr BOYERS:** Mr Speaker, I too would like to join the Member for Temotu Nende in congratulating the Deputy Speaker and Member for North West Choiseul for bringing up this matter of privilege under the Standing Orders.

I too would like to stand in the ranks of those in this House that disagree with this entitlement. Personally, I believe it is a mark on us as a Member of Parliament that for us to accept this sort of entitlement shows that we leaders are here for self interest and not our nation's interest. Yesterday when I found out

about this issue, I too inquired into the legality of whether this award should be included in the PER. Even though this motion is to be further referred to the House Committee, I believe the legality of it is highly questionable.

This brings to concern what the Member for Temotu Nende has mentioned about the other entitlements being included in the PER and whether they should be included in it as well as far as spouses, family etc. It is my understanding that the PER is specifically to enable Members of Parliament to carry out his or her duty as a MP and it seems to me that ....

**Hon GUKUNA:** Point of order. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just want to know whether this motion is for us to talk about referring this matter to the House Committee and whether we agree on it or not. It should be task of the committee to talk about it. We should not be raising issues in here because after all this matter has nothing to do with this House, but it belongs to the Commission and so we should not be saying things in here that will influence the Committee. The issue is that we have now raised a motion for this matter to be referred to the Committee and so we should agree whether to refer it to the committee or defeat it in here. But for us to debate it in here we will spend the whole day arguing over it. This motion is not asking us to talk about the conditions and also to spend this time going through the whole PER. I do not know what we are trying to prove. Are we trying to be angels or what? Only one issue was raised and that is the entitlement of spouses. That is the only issue that needs to go to the committee, and there is no need to spend time talking about the PER. We are not supposed to be debating anything else. I think we should all agree and just pass it so that it is given to the committee to look into it. I think it is beyond this House's ability to debate all the details of the PER. Mr Speaker, I would like your ruling on this.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you Honorable Minister. It is a motion and it is Parliament's privilege to discuss the general principles of the motion, and so I think we should allow the House to discuss it.

**Mr Boyers:** Thank you Mr Speaker and I thank the MP for Renbell/Bellona for reminding us that we are not here to contain ourselves and our privileges but we are trying to express our privileges and how it affects us as Members of Parliament on something that we have no decision over and that is why we are referring this to the House Committee to reflect on the privileges that we have the right to stand up and express.

Getting back to the motion, I think the motion raised is the correct way of dealing with it. I was also thinking of moving a motion on Private Members

Motion day in relation to this but decided not to, instead written a letter to the Commission requesting them to meet and review how the decision was made. In consulting the Commission yesterday, I was actually asked to write a letter so that the Commission could meet to discuss this issue so that our privileges are maintained and our rights to be able to express our disapproval on something that affects the integrity of this House, affects the integrity of the Speaker, and affects the integrity of the Clerk and integrity of Members of Parliament in this House.

Personally, I am upset that the general public is of the view that this House has no concern for this country in light of the financial problems we are having and in increasing the number of constituencies from 50 to 70 taking into account the very high expenditure this is going to create and the amount of expenditure to justify what we cannot spend in year's budget.

Mr Speaker, in referring this matter to the House Committee, I believe there should be proper consultation process involving this House reflecting what decisions we make could do to the integrity of Members of Parliament in this House.

I also believe it is a good opportunity for those who support it to express their views on the floor of Parliament too. Not referring it to the House Committee, those issues in this House like I have expressed should not be expressed. Personally, I do not believe my electorate would want to do anything to do with me if I am going to support spouses remuneration in the PER or any other matter.

I do not want to talk very long but I just like to acknowledge again my support for the motion moved by the Member of Parliament for Temotu Nende and also my appreciation to the Deputy Speaker for raising this as a matter of privilege.

With those few words, I support the motion.

**Mr Speaker:** Just to refresh our mind because it was a motion moved without notice and some of us might forget the language. The Clerk has helped us out by putting the words down and the motion is that Parliament resolves that the Parliament House Committee considers the matter raised by the Member of North Choiseul under Standing Order 25. This is just to refresh our memories again on the motion.

**Hon WALE:** Mr Speaker, I wish to, likewise, thank the Deputy Speaker for making the statement under privilege, and the mover of the motion, the assistant Deputy Leader of Opposition, the Member for Temotu Nende.

Sir, it is true to say that the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission is independent, however, I think Members of Parliament are members of the Commission and therefore I do not think we can push that independence too far because if Members of Parliament are members of the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission, matters that come before the Commission, which mostly regard entitlements may compromise the Commission's processes. Perhaps that is a matter for future in terms of making that Commission truly becoming dependent.

Sir, we have seen budget cuts across a number of sectors, Ministers answering questions and saying this or that project is not moving forward because of our financial situation given the global context and so it is important that these considerations are taken when decisions are made with regards to emoluments. What happens to the teachers, the nurses and other public servants who may have to be told to forgo any claims for increases in emoluments?

Sir, the matter of emoluments in the public sector must always, I think, as policy and good principle have regard to what is happening in the rest of the economy and certainly in the private sector. The private sector has to bear the burden; the largest share of burden of the tax and so there has to be some relationship to what is happening in that part of the economy so that emoluments do not get out of hand.

I note that the terminal grant to spouses is not the only matter that has been recently passed by the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission. There are also other matters perhaps to do with, and I do not really see it clear in writing but the terminal grants of us MPs and a gratuity. The argument has been put forward informally because a similar gratuity was paid to the head of state and so therefore we too also deserve it. I am not sure how accurate that description is but I think it needs to be cleared that as representatives of the people that we are sensitive to what our people are going through in these hard times, and that precedent whether it is appropriate or not is a judgment that should be taken into consideration as well. Although the PAC has officially made its determination on this matter, this motion is in order and it is good for the House Committee to look into it and perhaps express some views on it. Even if those views may not directly impact on the decision that has been taken by the PEC, but it could forward to some reforms in the PEC itself. We must learn from the example in UK where their Speaker resigned from and make our PEC truly become independent, perhaps wholly from people outside, perhaps in the private sector so that there is a stronger relationship in setting emoluments and other entitlements for Members of Parliament.

With those few thoughts, I support the motion.

**Hon. FONO:** Mr Speaker, first I want to thank the Deputy Speaker and MP for North West Choiseul for raising under matter of privilege this issue that has hit the headlines the whole of this week, which is the reason why the mover of this motion wants us to resolve to allow the House Committee to look into the issue.

Read the letters to the editor in all the newspapers, there is the misconception that it is Parliament that is awarding those entitlements. There is also the misconception that it is Cabinet that is awarding these entitlements. I must make it clear to the whole nation that the entitlements of Members of Parliament is not awarded by Parliament and not even the Cabinet but an independent body set up under the Constitution known as the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission.

That independent Commission has two Members of Parliament as members, which are the Minister of Finance and the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. They are members of the Commission to scrutinize any recommendations to the Committee and look at the economic implications and affordability of the government. Now that misconception in the papers is humiliating the spouses of MPs, to say the least. They are under pressure a lot of times and even people are asking them their own money at times. When people go to the MP but he is not there they ask the spouses to help them. Although some have given support when that intention came, although it is a noble intention, may be it is not the right time at the moment. However, it needs to be spelled out to the general public that it is not Parliament that has given that award and not Cabinet too but it was by a different committee. That is what I want to clarify in this debate for the public to know. We might be talking in English too much in this House and so our ordinary people in the streets do not understand us. It is important that we are referring this matter back to the House Committee through this motion and maybe the House Committee recommends it again to the PEC. Just before the MP for Temotu Nende raised the point of order, I was thinking of asking us to recommend it straight to the PEC to withdraw the award because it is making our spouses to feel ridiculed and embraced because of the media statements accusing them and us MPs.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important that before such awards are given, wider consultation is needed. To be honest the government has not made any recommendations this year. I know that it was last year that a special committee was set up by caucus to make recommendations to the PEC. This year there was no special committee by the government caucus to make any recommendations to the PEC. But I suppose individual Members have the right to recommend to the House Committee before the House Committee recommends to the PEC. That has been the practice when awards are given.

I only contribute because this is the first time for a privilege to be debated in here that directly relates to our entitlements otherwise it is not usual for Parliament to debate the entitlements of MPs on this floor, apart from privileges and other immunities and rights set up under section 69 of the Constitution. With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear to the public that we are not here to serve ourselves as some critics have labeled us. Members of Parliament are privileged because they won the democratic to become the spokesman or the leader of their electorates and therefore that privilege should be accorded a fair remuneration and that privilege is tried by people after every four years. If you want to take on those privileges, try the current sitting Members of Parliament in 2010. Rather than criticizing them on the papers every time, try and start campaigning now to win the seats of Parliament in 2010, and you will have that privilege. That is all I want to contribute on this motion and I support the motion. Thank you.

**Hon. SIKUA:** Mr. Speaker, I too want to contribute briefly on this motion just to clarify the government's position in addition to what the Deputy Prime Minister has mentioned. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Deputy Speaker and the Member of Parliament for North West Choiseul for bringing up this issue under matters of privilege. I also would like to thank the honorable Member for Temotu Nende for his interjection in getting this Parliament to make a resolution by way of a motion to the Parliamentary House Committee.

As has been explained by my Deputy Prime Minister, since this government came in, and I am sure this was also the practice during the time of the GCCG, every year when submissions are called to be made to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission for the PER in every April of each year, last year we formed a sub committee of Caucus to receive submissions from Members on the government side. After submissions are received this sub-committee compiles them and brings all the submissions to Caucus and Government Caucus approves them before the submissions are made to the PEC. That was done in late 2007 beginning of 2008 for submissions to the 2008 PER.

This year as has been mentioned by the Deputy Prime Minister, the government side did not go through that process. The sub committee was not set up and therefore there no submissions made to the Government Caucus for us to forward any submissions to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission. This is just to clear the government side. When this issue came out in the newspaper, I was also somewhat surprised at it. And so what I did as the leader of the government is to seek the advice of the learned Attorney General on this particular issue and he has given me his verbal advice upon my seeking advice yesterday. I requested him to tender his advice to me in writing so that upon

receipt of his advice in writing as to the legality of this particular award, I am going to write to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission to review its decision in view of the legal advice tendered to me in writing by the Attorney General. That is where I left it but I am happy that this matter has been raised on the floor of Parliament through our good Deputy Speaker and Member for North West Choiseul as a matter of privilege. I think the way we had handled is the way to go. I would like to thank the Member of Parliament once again. In clearing the government side, we had not as a collective body made this submission to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission. Therefore, I think the criticisms that have been leveled against Members of Parliament in the media are uncalled for and unfair. Now that we are handling this matter this way, I think the matter will be resolved. With these remarks, Mr. Speaker, I support this motion. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Gukuna:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this time just to clarify the point of order I raised. I was not trying to make my position on this issue but I was simply seeking your interpretation of the motion because I am not quite sure of it. It was a quick motion and so we did not understand it very well, and that is why I made that point of order.

But while I am standing, Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the point made by my colleague Minister of Education who raised a lot of things. I would like to correct him on the point that he wanted the private sector and he seems to be implying that the private sector will bear the brunt of the PER or the entitlement of spouses. He seems to be saying that the private sector is going to bear the brunt of it. I would like to correct that impression and assure the private sector that this is not going to result in any additional charges to them. We are just talking about the money that the government has. I think the Minister of Education has taken it too far by suggesting that the private sector will bear the brunt of this. It is not. I would like to correct this. The Minister is not here, he has gone out but I hope he is listening to me. I want to correct him that he has over sensationalized this issue and he should not be telling those kinds of information because it is not true. He even said today that he was not sure of that information. If you are not sure then do not say anything in Parliament. This is not a place of giving out unsure information.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the motion moved by the Member for Temotu Nende that we refer this matter to the Committee, and of course the other good points that have been raised. I want to also thank the Deputy Speaker for raising this issue because it is important. It has been an issue in the media as has been raised and I quite agree with all the points that have been raised and I do support this motion.

**Hon. LILO:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Deputy Speaker for raising that matter of privilege and, of course, the Member for Temotu Nende for spontaneously acted in moving this motion without notice. I fully support the motion without notice only on one basis, and that is I felt that constitutionally the award made by the PEC is really flawed in that our spouses do not fall under the purview of the PEC so that it makes that kind of award because they are not parliamentarians. The PEC should only make award that is based on parliamentarians and not the spouses. For that very reason, I felt that it is just right that we move this motion to refer it to the House Committee to look into it.

Mr. Speaker, on that point I would like, just in passing, raise a point on why this particular regulation was not detected by the AG's Chambers that is supposed to vet regulations before being gazetted. Any matter that passes through the Chambers should have been properly scrutinized and vetted. Why did it pass through the Chambers without being detected that that particular part is constitutionally flawed? That is the only question I want to raise here but I fully support the point why it should be referred to the House Committee. I think that is the right body it should be referred to, the House Committee so that the House Committee can refer that matter to the PEC that that particular award on that particular regulation the PEC has done is constitutionally not right. We should specifically seek the House Committee to revoke that particular award. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I support the motion.

**Hon. MAELANGA:** Mr Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the honorable Deputy Speaker for raising this very important issue. I also would like to thank the Member for Temotu Nende for moving this motion that we are now debating, and I shall be very brief.

Mr Speaker, I support what the Deputy Speaker said that this matter should be referred to the House Committee for it to look into. I also would like to say here that after reading what people have been writing in the print media and on the radio, as a Member of Parliament I myself too am not feeling well because those statements are hurting our spouses. I for one, since debating this issue in the honorable House made my decision that the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission should withdraw this award to spouses because I do not want to read statements against the wives of Members of Parliament. This is the reason why I stand to contribute to this motion. I must make myself clear that I think it is best to refer this issue to an independent body to look into it and not Parliament to discuss it here.

As the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned earlier on today, this is not an award made by Parliament or the Cabinet. This award was made by an

independent body, the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission. Therefore, this issue should be referred to the House Committee. I have already made known my decision that I want this award to Members of Parliament spouses to be withdrawn and I support the motion.

**Mr TANEXO:** Mr Speaker, I too wish to contribute very briefly and thank the Deputy Speaker for raising this very important issue. I also I thank the MP for Temotu Nende for moving the motion that we are debating now.

Mr Speaker, everybody who is, I am sure, should be speaking their minds but they are not speaking their minds. Some of them are trying to pretend. These are the issues. When I read the newspaper about the criticisms leveled against us, my good wife mentioned this, and I said it is true that when you become a leader you will be criticized. But criticisms give us strength. It strengthens us but one thing that I am sorry about is that we are legislators. The body that has been appointed has already broken the constitution. That is one point. We are here to legislate under the Constitution and to rule and reign and abide within the Constitution.

Yes, we saw the criticisms, maybe they are painful to the spouses but as leaders we have to accept the pain. But let us make the decision openly as to how that decision will come in. The mover of the motion wants to refer this issue and so it is good that we are going to refer it to the House Committee to look into that decision.

Mr Speaker, I have this to say. We are trying to set the principle. I am just saying this but the AG will clarify it for us. Does it mean that any laws we pass in here can be changed tomorrow if we wanted to? If that is so then it is very good because this is the legislature. I am glad that everybody is starting to see that as leaders we have to sacrifice. I too agree to the recommendation to withdraw the \$50,000 award to our spouses if the public thinks it is not timely, the people's power who voted us to come in here.

I want to say that the book of Proverbs Chapter 3:27-28 says "Whenever you possibly can, do good to those who need it. Never tell your neighbour to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now". That is the Scripture and that is exactly what is happening to our spouses, friends and fellow parliamentarians. The poor women, the poor spouses are not Members of Parliament but they stand besides us and so all the needs of our constituency, as leaders we attend to them, our spouses are part of it. Our people call in 24 hours a day to service them.

Right now, and maybe I am out of topic but I am trying to make the nation see so that there is no confusion that right now outside of Parliament there are many people waiting for the \$200,000 thousand micro projects. The Scripture

says you have to give them now and so you have no excuses. You cannot say this is mine but give it to them now. But when we give them we are criticized on the papers too. This is the Scripture. All of you who MPs who have received the micro, your people are waiting for you and so please give them. That is exactly what our fellow spouses do.

When the Member of Parliament is not at home or at his office, people go and knock at our doors and ask 'good mummy can you give me some money for my bus fare'. That is our culture. We are here to tell the truth and so I am telling the truth. When we read the newspapers it is painful to us a bit but I am glad that we are discussing it. I have this to say about these entitlements: Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and that is it. Any benefits to Members of Parliament, there must be a mechanism for it. I think it should be put to the Ministry and not to Members of Parliament. If it is for hospitals, roads or clinics, give it to the ministries, and give to Caesar what is due to Caesar. Then let us pass a law that says do not touch the Member because the Member is the legislator and not an administrator of money. He is the legislator to rule and guide.

We can stand here and talk about entitlements. If you give me entitlements according to that independent body and according to the laws and the Constitution of Solomon Islands then that is it, and we will be free. But we in here are not speaking our minds. When we go outside there we will complain against each other. This is to secure our children and our families. Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Many people are waiting outside now. I said to people in my office that all the applications to the Ministry of Rural Development for livelihood funds are for individuals to look after you. Your names are there, all the summaries are there and so please, do not disturb me because you will receive it. If the Minister of Finances releases the money then that is it. But let me tell you what the Scripture says that you do not withhold it, give it to them right now.

I support the motion that we refer this matter to the House Committee, which I am a member of. This is good but the only thing is to look at the independent body that made the decision. Some have had mentioned that some Members of Parliament are members of the Commission. Are we saying here that the decision made is illegal? Again that is for the AG to clarify but again we have to speak our mind truly for the legislator body being appointed for the benefit of our nation and our people.

Those criticisms made against us is expected, we cannot help it. As leaders it is painful to us but we expect to get a lot of criticisms but those criticisms will give us strength as well so that we do the right things. Those criticisms will be on papers because that is what we expect being voted in here

for. All those criticisms on the papers are painful. Our spouses feel very much disturbed most of the times in our homes. All of us are experiencing this; day and night people come to us asking for bus fares. Late at the night our spouses have to wake up and serve our people because that is our culture and there is no excuse. If somebody knocks at your door at night you have to wake up and attend to them. You will have to take transport them, you will have to take them to the hospital, and you will do all sorts of things. Nobody is going to deny this in here.

I thank the Deputy Speaker for raising this issue under matter of privilege and the mover of the motion for us to reconsider this. I think we should just withdraw this award so that people who voted us into this House are satisfied and then look at what better things can be done for Members of Parliament. We should not go outside there and criticize each other because our voters are waiting for us outside for the benefits.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I support the motion.

**Mr WAIPORA:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me this chance to contribute to this very important issue that we are debating right now.

Mr Speaker, let me go back to the time when this issue started. During the legislative council and the governing council times, Members of Parliament did not recognize their people when they go to them asking for things. People go to MPs as their clinic, as their roads and as their services. What happened is that they will work through their councils and the people submit their requests to the council when they need service. They take it that the parliamentarians or their MPs are in there to voice out the things they want.

Then during the 1970's and up campaigns went ahead and some candidates started promising people that if they vote for them they will do this and that for them. Those things creep up because of promises made by candidates. And so when we come in here and talk about development, we Members of Parliament become their bread and butter every day, their transport, their knife and their everything at this time. As time goes on it became something different just because after 1983 I can see that they started off this sickness and it became very strong when Members during those times put in place what was called the discretionary fund at that time. From that time the eyes of our people started to open when they see that there is something. People started to group together and go to Members of Parliament with the hope of getting help on things they want, say may be outboard motors and other things and then it went to the extent of paying their fares to go back home.

Because of that there is a problem created to the extent that today we are now talking about what has happened. But there is a problem there and that is

why some people with a genuine thinking would like to look at how this can be addressed. We come talking in here every day that some of us, may be some of you are not but some of us every day are hosting about 20 to 30 people in the House. Even when they want to go back they turn around and ask you to pay for their fares to go back home. And while we are here in Parliament, like the Honorable Deputy Prime Minister has said, people go to our wives asking for \$200 to buy things for themselves, and that that kind of thing.

I am not trying to defend this decision but I am trying to mentioning what is actual life. We are here but some people go to our wives asking for money and they have to be told to wait for us. Sometimes if the wives have \$200 they just have to give it to the woman or man. This is a fact of life. They treat you as their Member of Parliament and their wives as their everything. This is because we created this problem for ourselves through RCDF and other funding like that.

I can see that the more funding we are creating the more problem we are creating for ourselves. I am afraid that this \$50,000 we are talking about now will just increase the problem in the house for our wives. That is how I see it. If this \$50,000 is given to our wives, people will now say that their Honorable is receiving \$50,000 and so they will come to us. We are actually not solving our problem, but we are creating more and more problems for ourselves.

In my view, all the funding that we are receiving such as the Rural Constituency Development Fund, the micro and the others should be done away with if we are genuine leaders of this country. That is my view on this because whatever we are branching out is also creating more problems for us to answer this way and that way.

When I was in the Council before and the late Jack Campbell was our member at that time, we did not ask him for anything because we thought that he was our leader to talk on our behalf on issues affecting Makira Island. That is the thinking of before. Today people wanted to vote for you because when you come into this House you have to give money to them. And that is not development because it is going to personal pockets. None of those people we see filling up the micro and RCDF forms spent the money on what they applied for. May be some are true but some are not.

What I am saying here is that there is a problem there. There must be an education program to inform the people that MPs do not have money to continue giving to them. If I have to continue giving money to them then I would steal for them in order to do that because where would I get money to continue giving to people. It does not matter how many rules the Deputy Prime Minister comes up with through all sorts of forms, those forms are not going to work. Because people would come to us today saying that their son or daughter

are sent out from the school. Therefore, it is quite difficult to follow the forms or the agreement and the retirement.

Sir, I am telling you what is actually happening because I am a Member of Parliament for two terms now. I think that instead of criticizing us with this \$50,000, which is for a very true thing, just come and be a member yourself and you will find what we are experiencing. It is a very true thing that there is a problem. We, Members of Parliament find that there is a great problem that people come to us every day. In the mornings we are yet to have our breakfast but people have already come to us. One came to me this morning and I have to tell him that I am still to have my breakfast and so he has to wait or come back later. And this is simply because it is still very early in the morning but they are here already.

I am just trying to find ways of how we are going to resolve this problem. I think instead of giving \$50,000 to our wives maybe they should be given a bit of allowance so that when people come to ask them for assistance they can give it to the people so that there are no headaches on our wives. You become a man because of that woman. You become a leader because of a woman. You become what you are today because a woman stands behind you. Of all the big man there is a woman behind him, and so let us not criticize them very much but let us look at this problem and try to resolve it. What you are saying is well understood by me because I also have that problem. I am not fighting for that \$50,000 to be given to my wife, no, but we must find a solution for it because this is a big problem. We must make an education program to inform our people that the RCDF, micro and millennium funds are for water supply at home and not for paying of fares. I think one section of Parliament Office should educate our people on the role of parliamentarians and what the funds are for. Go and talk on the radio every day informing our people about all these things. Tell them that parliamentarians do not have money because money is at back at our homes.

Sir, I think the approach to this matter we are talking about is not quite right. Let us approach it in a different way. But we must realize what our wives are facing. We cannot disregard the problem our wives are facing. Right now whilst we are talking here some people are already at our houses.

Sir, I do not oppose this motion, it is a good motion that calls for our consideration. I think it is better for the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission to review it. But try and help in a way that solves our problem and that of our spouses because they are having a hard time. I support this motion and my suggestion is to put this matter back to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission to re look at it. With those few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion.

**Hon. SOFU:** Mr Speaker, I also want to join other colleague Members of Parliament who have already spoken on this matter raised by the Deputy Speaker under matter of privilege.

Sir, I want to take this opportunity in acknowledging all the comments made in the print media whether it be the Solomon Star or the other newspapers. We are leaders of this nation and it is a normal thing for any leader to receive comments like that. They are there for our correction. Mr. Speaker, if those comments had not been made in the Solomon Star, the Deputy Speaker would not have raised this matter this morning. But because of those comments, this issue was brought before us this morning.

Sir, just to bring comfort to all Members of Parliament, this is Solomon Islands, and we are the leaders of Solomon Islands. We may have ways of doing things, we have our own attitudes and our characters but the situations in the rural areas are different altogether. Whatever we can express in here regarding our constituents is the way we think. They are our people, they are our voters. The house must be full, and that is our way, and the culture of Solomon Islands. That is our culture. I do not want to dwell on that because as a Member of Parliament for the past few years and the years to come, the situation will continue to be like that. How many times we may express it in here will not stop but it will continue. We ourselves should know how to handle our people.

I now want to discuss this very important issue. I have a few things to say before I sit down because almost everything has been mentioned by the others already. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to criticize the PEC but thank them, because they are there to look after the welfare of Members of Parliament. That is their function set out under the Constitution, which other Members of Parliament who have already spoken also confirmed. I thank the Commission for the fact that it has seen this need and that is why it included it in the PER. In fact, the Commission has seen that this is a real need and that is why it included spouses of Members of Parliament in the entitlement and so we must thank the Commission. The only disadvantage is that may be it is not timely. All the entitlements under the PER are not secret.

There is still time left from the 21<sup>st</sup> April this year to 21<sup>st</sup> April 2010 that anything that is not right or anything unconstitutional can be removed or amended. The PER is for Members of Parliament as some have already stated today, it covers Members of Parliament and rightly so. If anything is not right I believe that body will look into it.

My second point relates to consultation, and I totally agree with what the Minister for Environment said earlier on today about this. Consultation is

important. For the future, consult with the AG chamber on anything so that we do not stir up unnecessary arguments in the media.

My third point is that spouses of Members of Parliament are not asking for this award from Members of Parliament. This must be made clear to the public and even the constituencies that we Members of Parliament represent here that our spouses are not asking for this terminal grant. As I mentioned earlier on today that body, the PEC may have seen the real need for it, and that is why it addressed it that way. And there are ways of doing it. The public who is listening in right now and even those writing in the media, let me tell you that spouses of Members of Parliament are not asking for this allowance. Not at all! It is good that criticisms are expressed in the media for leaders to understand.

Sir, as I have already said I must talk straight on the point otherwise I might talk on other entitlements and funds that we are already aware of, but those are three of the points I tried to register in my short contribution on this motion.

With these few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion.

**Hon. SOGAVARE:** Mr. Speaker, I too would like to join my voice in commenting on this motion that is before the House, which I understand arose from a matter of privilege raised by the Deputy Speaker.

Sir, I think the sentiments raised are understandable, and I understand that this is a motion we are discussing as a house, and not as government and opposition but it is something that is affecting every one of us and so we have freedom in expressing our views and if we do not agree on the views expressed by some colleagues then we have to express it so, like the views expressed by the Minister of Culture and Tourism rebutting the views expressed by the Minister of Education on the exception he took initially on the statement made by the Member for Vona Vona. It is understandable, as it is something affecting every one of us. I guess we are placed in the position now, in front of the camera and the radio to discuss this matter openly as part of the exercise of transparency and accountability and so I guess we do not have complaint on that.

It is normal as we climb up the echelon of leadership in the country that the higher you go the more attention you are drawing from people, and whatever we do, even if we move one step or one inch our people will take notice of those moves. I think the same is also true that the higher we go and we handle things wrong the harder we fall too, and it can be hurtful.

To be a Member of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, as we have expressed several times already, is a voluntary job, a job that nobody pushes us into it. In fact, we go and sell ourselves to the people; we go and market ourselves. Getting people to this house the process that is in our law is that it is us that must go and preach

to our people what we can do in this House. If we are part of a political party, if we are a member of a political party we must go and preach our political ideologies and the programs that we intend to do when come into Parliament. And so it is a voluntary job, there is no set qualification, the only qualification in the Constitution is that you must be 21 years old and not underage, you are not mental, you are not sick and so forth to qualify. Those are the only qualifications stated in the Constitution. Apart from that there are no set academic qualifications or whatever, experience or whatever, none at all. The Constitution does not say that. And every one of us in here, if you are not a minister but an ordinary Member of Parliament, unless you are entrusted with some work you are paid for the work you are doing. If you are a minister your salary is kept at a different level, if you are a Prime Minister it is at a different level, the Deputy Prime Minister at a different level, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament at a different level and so forth. In regards to remunerations, Mr. Speaker, it does not matter who you are that when you come into this house you are treated the same. In fact there is no set hour of work. Even if you are a minister, you can work one hour and you go back home. There is no set hour of work. If you check any rule books of Parliament they do not say you have to sit down in the office for eight hours. They do not say that. You are there to ensure that government programs, government businesses are going ahead and the permanent public service that is always there to carry out the policy of the government are working and carrying out those policies.

By the same token there is also no provision for leave too. Once you become a Member of Parliament you are a Member of Parliament for four years and you are expected to work those four years and, of course now the occasioned visits to your constituency, again under the parliamentary privileges we are allowed a number of visits to our constituencies, and the state pays for those visits when we go and visit our people in the constituencies. That is basically the nature of our work.

I think the recent uproar by the people in seeing this award is that I think they are trying to match those things. They are saying that these are the guys that come and advertise themselves that they are going to Parliament to do this and that. And they see that whatever is to be awarded to them is something they do not properly understand. I probably agree with the views expressed that may be there is need for some more education to inform our people what these things are all about. And I appreciate, I guess, the initiative taken by the Prime Minister to immediately consult the Attorney General on this. When issues like that happen, you quickly take it to the appropriate authorities and question the legality of it. You question whether it is done properly. Immediately when issues like that are questioned, actions like that are taken and the Prime Minister

has taken the appropriate move in getting it to the Attorney General to establish its legality and maybe move on from there after advice is given to him.

I also read the statements in the newspaper, and they are quite heavy. If you read the statements they did not really complain about the 'behind every great man is a good woman'. What they are complaining about, the way it appears on the 'behind every great man is there are women', there are women, the 02, 03 and so forth. If you look at the statements that is how it is put. They are not complaining about 'behind every great man is a great woman'. What they are complaining about is behind every great man there are women. I think we need to read the statements in the newspapers very well.

Sir, that aside just for us to laugh a bit, the state has the duty to look after people who come to this level of leadership. That is very clear if you read all the regulations and read all laws that are available. I think that needs to be understood right from the very beginning when we talk about these things. The state has the responsibility to ensure that people who come at this level of leadership are taken care of. Because you are not talking about a company or you are not talking about a family business or some church organizations but you are talking about the state, the business of the state. That is the level where we are now and we are privileged to be voted into and to be a member of the highest executive decision making body of the land and so the state has the responsibility to make sure it looks after us. That is why it gives free housing to Ministers. Other amenities like water, electricity and gas are also looked after by the state. It gives them appropriate level of salaries. And if they do other work besides just being a MP, like you are a member of standing committees you are also recognized. That needs to be appreciated right from the very beginning.

Mr Speaker, with that, I think the law is also very clear on how level of remunerations and the entitlements given to us are set in return for the responsibilities entrusted on us as Members of this House. It places that responsibility of looking after us and the appropriate level of remunerations to be paid to us on the Commission, the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission. The law is also very clear on how the PEC would determine what is appropriate to be paid to us. Of course, submissions come from us and there is nothing also stopping people outside to make submissions to the Commission. The Constitution sets it very clear as to the criteria it will use to set the salaries and the entitlements of MPs under Section 69(b) of the Constitution. It says, "Power to determine the entitlements of parliamentarians and to amend them by yearly review shall vest in the members of the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission". Then it goes ahead and say, "in the exercise of their powers, the members of the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission shall consider such representation as they may receive from persons or body of persons within such

time as may be noticed by them” and then “(b) have regard to such information as may be supplied to them by the government, Parliament or any other organizations in relation to the following matters” and under (b)(i) “the state of the national economy and the financial position of the government”. That is one, and that is to do with the affordability issue. The next one is a Roman numeral (ii), movements in the level of pay and other entitlements admissible to other persons in employment. That looks at other people in employment, may be some kind of responsibilities that is entrusted on Members of Parliament so that when we come up with these entitlements it is seen to be reasonable. In Roman numeral (iii) is changes in the retail price index and other relevant indicators showing the cost of maintaining the standard of living that parliamentarians might reasonably be expected to enjoy, and it makes reference to parliamentarians. Whether they are former parliamentarians is not very clear here. That is probably where terminal grants and other payments that we are asking the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission to consider when MPs leave their work as parliamentarians so that they also continue to enjoy reasonable assistance from the government to continue looking after them. These are the things the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission should really be looking at. I think that is where the issue really comes down to it, and not only the new entitlement to spouses but probably other entitlements that the PEC has made a decision on that we may need to reconsider, whether the decision made by the PEC in looking at these issues and seriously considers them, and that is probably where the legal issue the Prime Minister is talking about will come up, the constitutional criteria that are set here whether the PEC has taken those into account when it came up with those decisions.

Sir, as rightly pointed out by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Parliament is not involved here and neither is the government and Cabinet. There are submissions made by, of course, there is nothing stopping individual Members of Parliament to make their submissions to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission, and it is the PEC that comes up with these decisions.

Sir, I think the way we want to go here in addressing this issue whether it goes to the Parliamentary House Committee, which is made up of all politicians or it goes back to the PEC to be reviewed if you talk about independent. In fact, the over argument on independent is what brought about this issue. If the so called independent PEC came up with decisions like that, they even questioned that independent commission too, with all due respect. To throw this issue to the House Committee, and this committee is comprised of all politicians. They will be discussing the very issues that we are discussing here but in a smaller room or a confined room and who knows what they will be discussing there. That is my only concern. If we truly want an independent body to look at this then I think

that is an issue we need to look at. Whether the suggestion made by the colleague for West Makira is for us to look at the PEC and review it. But I share the sentiments raised by other colleagues that our spouses feel very bad about this as it is not their making. They did not apply for this award. They did not get together in some meetings somewhere and agree to apply to the Commission to look at giving them this award. No, it is not. Maybe there were some submissions made by others and they are caught here, headlined in the editorial questioning them, and so they feel bad about it. I think it is very appropriate that we are discussing it at this level so that people can hear it since it becomes a public issue and a headline in the news. I think members of the Public Service too questioned this award and they came out very clear in the news too that they will probably put in their logs of claims in response to the improvements in the terms and conditions of Members of Parliament. That is an issue that should be appropriately discussed at this level and we make our intention known to our people who are listening out today that we are willing to address this issue and the approach we want to take now as couched in this motion and one that is passed in this House will go to this Committee to reconsider it, and maybe that committee will write a letter to the PEC on our view as Members of Parliament on this issue that is now becoming a public issue.

Sir, that is my brief contribution to this motion, and I have no problem supporting this motion.

**Mr BOSETO:** Mr Speaker, I am going to be very brief. First, I thank the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, the Honorable Member for North West Choiseul for raising this concern and also the mover of the motion to refer this to the House Committee. Mr Speaker, I want to also express my appreciation to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission. Perhaps it has a concern, an impartial concern in trying to help our wives.

Yesterday my wife and I reached already consensus that the decision for this award to remain unchanged. My wife has already made up her mind not to accept it knowing that we are not in the same way of looking at it and because of that I support the motion. This may not be the right time perhaps to make these awards. Maybe it does not really help us to look more closely into the way that we develop our political developments, economic revitalization and all that should be taken into consideration. Therefore, it is a concern of the whole development, particularly the national budget and all that is coming in to this, and so perhaps we need wise consideration and therefore I support the motion to refer this matter to the House Committee and from there, perhaps the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission will re-look at it again. I support the motion. Thank you.

**Mr AGOVAKA:** Mr Speaker, I am going to be brief as well in contributing to this motion. First of all, I would like to thank the Member for North West Choiseul for bringing the matter to the House and the Member of Temotu Nende for bringing it as a motion.

Mr Speaker, as you know the work of a Member of Parliament falls into two major categories. One and foremost is a legislator and secondly a provider for the people of the constituency.

Keeping and accommodating people is part of our culture and custom, it is something that we grow up with, it is our way of life that we cannot go out of or leave it. Today the people of our constituency are commercializing Members of Parliament. They are using them for bus fares, they are using them to pay for napkins, and they are using them to pay bags of rice. This is commercializing Members of Parliament.

Sir, spouses are really the mother of the constituency, whichever constituencies you come from. Like the Leader of Opposition has said that behind every great leader is a great woman, the spouses are really our right hand person. So much so that in some households, like my house it has become a public house for the constituents. People come to our house and use our utensils, our kitchen wares, our bed sheets and beds, towels and you name it, so much so also that our children do not have privacy in our homes. Even Members of Parliament and their spouses do not have privacy for themselves because every day we have people in our homes. The spouse wakes up in the morning, cooks breakfast for more than 20 people or hundreds of people who come to the house. They feed them at lunch time and they feed them at dinner time. For me as a Member of Parliament I have no problem with this, because as I have said that keeping and accommodating people is part of our culture and custom and it is our way of life.

Mr Speaker, so what is the way out when people complain about the \$50,000 terminal grant? In my view, I also think it is not proper that spouses' terminal grants should be in the PER because the PER is mainly for Members of Parliament conditions as well as their spouses and families. There must be a way out to this.

I think we should devise incentives that provide for spouses to do business so that the business can support her in providing the people with bus fares, rice, etc for our people or maybe we should establish a discretionary fund for the upkeep of constituency needs. Or we may think of putting them on the payroll by creating positions like the CDOs because after all the spouses are slaving whilst we are here debating this issue. They are slaving at our houses, working for people of the constituency in the constituency.

What else can we do about this? Do we take part of our micro funds, the RCDF and the Millennium and say here is \$10,000 for you. That is not fair because the money belongs to people in the constituency and if we use these funds people will condemn us. So what is the way out? I believe there is a way out. I believe by referring this issue to the House Committee, it will probably come up with something to table before Parliament.

Sir, before I sit down, I would like to thank the wisdom of the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission for seeing it fit in recognizing the hardship that spouses of MPs have gone through by making this terminal grant. However, this gratitude can be dealt with through other means. It is to this end that I really support the motion and I beg to take my seat.

**Hon. SOALAOI:** Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me to add my voice to the debate of the motion. At the outset, I first all thank the Deputy Speaker for raising this issue under Standing Order 25. I also thank my colleague MP for Temotu Nende for moving this motion. Although it is a last minute motion, most of us are not really prepared to debate a motion of such a nature and so my contribution would not be in order because this motion is of that nature too.

Sir, I share the sentiments raised by colleague Members of Parliament. I too did not feel very well about what has been said about our spouses. I treat my wife as my partner and so whatever people say about her makes me feel bad. I guess we all share the same feeling that we love our wives and so when somebody says something bad about them, it makes us feel bad too. I also wish to thank the PEC for the seeing the need. I do not know whether we are honest in what we are saying in here.

When I look at myself as a leader, when this award came out, I talked about it with my wife and I tried to analyze it myself, and I think it is a good thing. But seeing that I am a leader what would my people think and say about the award too. Those questions started coming up in my mind too. With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify what some people are saying in the media and even inside this chamber that I am not here to serve myself. I am here to serve this country and to serve my electorate. As the MP for Temotu Vatu I am here to serve my people of Solomon Islands and my constituency. Some people think that they know what is going on inside my mind. No, I think only God knows what is in mind. I must say here that God knows that I am here to represent my people not my personal interest.

We have been saying a lot of things, which made me think whether we are honest or we just want to cover up. I do not know because I cannot tell what is going on in your minds, just like you would not know what is going on in my

mind. But I think what makes our people to see us the way they see us now is also caused by ourselves.

Sir, when I came into Parliament I observed how people treat their Members of Parliament including my own people. I think we should learn from the people of Choiseul Province. I say this because I observed a bit how they treat their Members of Parliament. I think they are educated a bit on the roles of their Member of Parliament and that is why I say that.

Our people are not lazy and they are not cheaters. Some of us get angry with them when they come to our homes, but I think we just need to educate them, especially on their roles. I think our roles are always mentioned in here many times and so our people should understand it. I think their role as voters is what they need to be educated on. Of course, everybody knows that we are here to make laws and Solomon Islands is a country that apart from your primary responsibility, if you cannot do other things they will see you as not capable.

Whilst I appreciate the fact that I am a law maker, I am very happy to play other roles too in regards to our culture. Even if a man comes falling down hungry in my house, I must rescue him. I am not complaining about how my people treat me but there are just many people to blame; ourselves and our voters. Maybe time will come that things will change.

Sir, as I have already said I think our people can do some useful things. I know that the mango tree over there if it has fruits, its fruit will be gone even if the fruits are not ready. Some people are sitting down outside there waiting for you and if you do not go out they start to climb the mango tree. But I want to urge our good people to involve themselves on things that are useful. To totally depend on somebody else for your survival in town is not good. I know you too are thinking like this. I do not want people to think that my people are not doing things. I value my people and I want to urge them to do something useful. The Bible too says that you have to sweat before you eat, and not another man to feed you. But I am pleased to help those who come to me with their needs, and that is why I thank the PEC. But I also support the motion moved by the Hon. Member for Nende to refer this matter to the House Committee. I also start to have the thinking that we are trying to step into the shoe of a different person. We are not supposed to talk about this in here, especially when it deals with our own entitlements. I think it is good for another person to talk about it because whilst we are talking now others will read us the way we talk. I think we really need to do the right thing, exercise wisdom on this issue, especially when it brings a lot of negative publicity on our spouses. I come to the conclusion that we should refer it to the House Committee to look at reviewing the award.

Mr. Speaker, otherwise our people think that this is going to be paid tomorrow. It is not. It is going to be paid after four years and so the economics

of it might look good after the four years. But as leaders, already this does not look right. And I go inline with those who would like to ask the Committee to withdraw this award and find other ways of addressing the problems faced by our spouses. I think this is going to question our integrity as Members of Parliament and lawmakers. We do not know whether our people will start to say this is going to be our last term, next year they will put in another man. But think about it, otherwise the next person is going to be worse than us. But it is easy to see things from outside and criticize. I know it because when I was outside I also say why are Members doing this and that? But when I actually came inside I found that it is not like what I had thought it to be. It is really a challenging job, and I think it is a job that is mostly fitting for those that even though they are swore at but they can still work. That is the kind of person you are listening to who is talking right now. I always accept criticisms because I know that as a leader I have to prepare for those things. That is what you expect for coming to Parliament and so you must prepare for it. Even though people disagree with me or even want to say abusive words against me, I just accept it and use it as something to make changes to my life as a leader.

As I said in the beginning that my comments may not be really in order, but I would like to thank once again thank the Deputy Speaker for raising this matter. It is raised under our Standing Orders and so it is in order. I also thank the mover of the motion for seeing it fit to refer this matter to the House Committee. The point I would like to reemphasize again is that I do not feel well talking about issues concerning ourselves, especially when our entitlements. Let others talk about it. With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to support this motion.

**Mr. KENGAVA:** Mr Speaker, just to commend the Member for Temotu Nende for seeing it fit in moving this motion. I would like to briefly comment also on this motion.

Sir, the MP for Temotu/Nende must be congratulated for seeing it fit in moving this motion on the floor of Parliament so that the matter of privilege I raised is not swept away from the floor of this Parliament. As leaders, I think we have done the right think in allowing this motion to be debated here freely by each Member of Parliament.

Sir, when I raised this matter of privilege this morning, I feel very much alone in this Chamber, not knowing whether it is not only me who feels bad about this particular award. Now I feel much more comfortable knowing that all of us are not pleased with the award made by the PEC to our spouses. It is from that perspective that this motion is very useful so that it is appropriately referred to the House Committee to re-look at it favorably from our point of view and that of our spouses and also our people in the constituencies.

Sir, I think one thing the motion does is that it allows Parliament to be more transparent, and this is not so much because of the media but such an award needs the position of Members of Parliament to be clarified in public. Those of us who have spoken have made the point very clear that we are not responsible in awarding entitlements to ourselves. That point was clearly made by the Deputy Prime Minister. I am glad the Prime Minister has also made it very clear that the government has no position on this. This is very important, and this is the point why I raised this as a matter of privilege so that Parliament's integrity remains as it is.

Sir, I also would like to thank the contribution by the Leader of Opposition who clarified situations surrounding our roles and the position we are taking. I think the public, because of this motion will now better understand that we are their leaders and that we remain their leaders, we remain as leaders of integrity and leaders that have certain privileges that we protect so that this Parliament is the highest decision making body in the country.

Sir, I think recognizing the hard work of spouses of Members of Parliament could be looked at in other ways. In my statement this morning I suggest other ways that the House Committee could look at such as allowances or gratuity payment or whatever it is. Other Members also suggested the same things, and so we leave it to the House Committee's discretion to deliberate on those ideas.

Lastly, at the back of my mind, I feel that I must move this matter of privilege probably because of my role as the Deputy Speaker comes into mind and I feel that the integrity of this Parliament, the privileges that we have need to be raised here so that all of us have the opportunity to clarify to the public our position. I think that has now been made. I am sure the public will understand our position in allowing the Housing Committee to carry out its duty. I also think the public will understand that the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission also has the duty of looking at the welfare and needs of Members of Parliament.

Sir, second to that, I made it independently knowing that the people of my constituency will not agree with this particular award. I make this on their behalf on the floor of this Parliament, and also my family who are the only people I consulted before I raised this matter of privilege this morning.

Sir, in conclusion I would like to say that the motion taken up by the Member of Parliament for Temotu Nende paves the way for us to look more carefully at this particular decision made by the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission needs to be dealt with further and be more fairly dealt with for all of us. I am sure our spouses will now feel a little bit better knowing that we defend them on the floor of this Parliament. The public will also know that we

are not directly responsible for that particular award, and I think we need to be more open and allow the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission to do its work and also the Parliamentary Housing Committee once this motion is passed to do its work as well. With those brief remarks I support the motion.

**Mr. Oti:** Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to once again thank every Member, Ministers, backbenchers and this side of the house for all your contributions made on this motion that I moved without notice under Standing Order 25(4) this morning.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps at the outset too I would like to make a point as a matter of order, which I think was also raised by the Minister for Tourism this morning when the Member for Vona Vona started his contribution to the debate on the motion.

Mr. Speaker, it is not right to criticize the work of any institutions and bodies established under the Constitution on this floor of Parliament. I think that was where that point of order was coming from. Although, Mr. Speaker, in your ruling you allowed as much as possible for us to talk on the motion, but still in the end we cannot avoid the issue of questioning the decision of a commission established under the Section 69 of the Constitution. It is rather unfortunate that it must happen that way but perhaps we should not look at it as a criticism of that Commission. Taking it from another angle we should just question how the Commission was able to come up with awards like that. Unfortunately, as has also been raised here, is the point on the constitutionality of that particular award, whether the spouses are qualified under the PER to be receiving this kind of grant. This is where the law officers of the government come in. So entirely there is not anyone to be blamed. First of all, the contributors, all of us who contributed to this motion that it is not our doing that this award was made but it was made by the Commission. It belongs to the Commission and there are checks and balances to ensure that the credibility of all the commissions, the decisions of Parliament are appropriately and properly checked and that is why we have the law officers in the Attorney General's Chambers. Whether the spouses who are now becoming the subject of ridiculed is not their fault, as all of us know already and I have pointed out. People who have been vested with the authority to make sure that there is orderliness in the governance are the ones not doing their work. Otherwise this should not have ever come to the spotlight. In fact, if anything, those in the AG's Chambers should all be sacked.

Mr. Speaker, that being said I mentioned because it went out and we are starting to question an independent commission. But Section 137 of the Constitution says that any commission established by the constitution cannot be subject to any other authority or the direction of anyone except the power given to it under the

Constitution, and therefore the reference made in referring it to the House Committee is by virtue of Section 62 of the Constitution whereby that establishes the Standing Orders, and Standing Order 70, 71(a) and 71(d) is giving power to the House Committee to consider and advise on any matters relating to the conditions of service of Members of Parliament, in which case it would be in order now. As a Parliament, in our debate we do not have the authority to influence or redirect the Commission except through another instrument established by the Constitution, which is Section 62 of the Constitution that establishes the Standing Orders, the House Committee, Section 71(a) & (d) gives the authority to the House Committee to look more into what is affecting Members of Parliament in their conditions of service. And so it is quite in order. We are trying to invoke all the constitutional provisions to ensure that we bring this matter to where it should rest. It is also the only authority that can make recommendation to the PEC, taking into account what we are saying in here today. But perhaps it will be up to the House Committee and your office to call every one of us as witnesses to find out your thinking because what you are saying here may not necessarily be what the Committee would be taking on directly. The Committee will have the responsibility of taking and hearing from different stakeholders on how to resolve this issue. We hope that your office, Mr Speaker, is going to facilitate the work of the House Committee to perform the functions expected of this motion so that at the same time we also tell our people that the matter is now being put to rest, it is now being addressed through the appropriate channels and perhaps due respect and due diligence should therefore be given to any material that comes out from this Parliament and its institution so that as much as possible. As the Member for North West Choiseul has raised this morning under Standing Order 5 that indeed these are real issues affecting the credibility of Parliament, both collectively and individually as we stand in this House to perform our duty as legislators and policy makers of this country.

Mr Speaker, I have no further comment to make but I can only assure Parliament and the public that the House Committee unfortunately has a bit of conflict of interest. I moved this motion and I am also a member of the House Committee. In fact, it will be very difficult to play neutral in that instance but we will do our utmost best to ensure that the matter is resolved for the benefit of everyone, the public, Members of Parliament and the media in particular for taking on that aspect of it and put it in perspective so that there is no improper misrepresentation of all stakeholders that are concerned with this particular matter brought up this morning.

With those comments, Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

**Mr Speaker:** The question is that Parliament resolves that the Parliamentary House Committee considers the matter raised by the Member of North West Choiseul under Standing Order 25.

*The motion is passed*

**Hon Sikua:** Mr Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

*The House adjourned at 12.03 pm*