

FRIDAY 13TH DECEMBER 2013-

The Speaker of Parliament Sir, Allan Kemakeza took the chair at 9:48am

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

All members of parliament are present except the: Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Minister of Civil Aviation and Meteorology, Minister of Infrastructure Development, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Education and Human Resources, and the Members of Parliament for: Fataleka, North West Guadalcanal, South New Georgia-Rendova/Tetepari, North Guadalcanal, North New Georgia.

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, the Government has requested the Parliamentary House Committee to have this Friday as a government business day. The House Committee agreed to this and granted the government its request. However, by an earlier resolution of the House, the Education and Human Resource Training Committee is supposed to report to the House on its inquiry into Teacher Absenteeism in Solomon Islands on 15th December, which is on Sunday. Unfortunately, with the Budget coming before Parliament and the tight deadline that we have, this is not possible. Thus, the Chair of the Education Committee has requested the House Committee to set the motion for extension of the reporting deadline for today. I understand that the House Committee has done this pursuant to Standing Order 15(3)(c).

I understand the Chair of the Education and Human Resources Committee will give the reasons for his motion. But I would also like to thank the House Committee for its wisdom in appreciating the need for this motion. Let us now move on to the next item of business.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA (*Central Guadalcanal*): Thank you for giving me this opportunity to move Motion No. 20 standing in my name in today's Order Paper. The motion reads that Parliament extends the reporting date for the Education and Human Resources Training Committee (EHRTC) inquiry into teacher absenteeism from the 15th December, 2013 to the first sitting day of the House in 2014 or any day before that sitting day.

Before proceeding any further, I would like to thank the House Committee and the hard working Chairman for setting down this motion today pursuant to Standing Order 15(3)(c). I also wish to extend my gratitude to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet for appreciating the urgency of this matter. The object of this motion is to seek a resolution from the House for further extension to the reporting date for the EHRTC inquiry into teacher absenteeism in Solomon Islands.

This motion seeks to extend the reporting date to the first sitting day of the House in 2014 or any day before the sitting date. With the House's indulgence, allow me to briefly state the reasons for this extension. The draft report is complete, and it is with Committee members for their consideration. I have here in front of me the draft report of the Committee. However, as we all know, most members of the EHRTC are also members of the Public Accounts Committee which makes it difficult for me to get members to meet to consider the report for tabling it today or before the 15th of December 2013. As such, we simply do not have time to thoroughly scrutinise the draft report and also work on the budget at the same time. We do recognise that the Budget requires our undivided attention and therefore, the Education Committee cannot in good faith bring a report before the House that does not fully reflect the subject matter of the inquiry without thorough scrutiny.

The current hearings by the Public Accounts Committee and the tight schedule for the debate on the 2014 Appropriation have fully stretched the resources

available to the Education Committee. The Committee Secretariat has been working around the clock to ensure the Public Accounts Committee satisfies its constitutional function and this has deprived the Education Committee of the services of the Committee Secretariat.

The extension of the reporting date does not have any financial implications. This motion simply recognises the exclusive cohesion of the House over its own business and proceedings. The House has extended the reporting deadline in the past by a resolution and therefore, only the House can grant further extension.

As I have said already, the report is here now and it just needs the Committee to sit and scrutinise it properly before it is tabled in Parliament. It will not cost us anything than just sitting down as a committee to look into it further. With these few remarks, I beg to move

(The floor is now open for debate)

Hon GORDON DARCY LILO (*Prime Minister*): I would like to thank the Chairman of the Education & Human Resources Training Committee for moving this motion seeking the Parliament to extend the reporting date for the Committee to report to Parliament about its findings on this very important issue that is affecting the education sector of our country.

This side of the House does not have any problem with the extension. I think the Committee needs to be given time to do a proper editing and auditing of the report so that Parliament is given a report that is of quality and the details required for Parliament to deliberate on the report. At the same time we do understand that the time members are required to participate in this Committee is quite demanding given the overlapping responsibility they have to perform as well in the other committees. In view of that, I think it is only fair that we need to give justice to them to be able to commit their time and their services fairly to this Committee.

The Minister for Education & Human Resource Development has asked for a day off today as he is visiting his constituency and will be back next week. But I will

inform him when he returns of the extension and where he may be required to give service to the Committee, I can assure the Committee that where it may require the services of the Ministry of Education in whatever it wants to be able to come up with a good report, it is at liberty to do that and I am sure officers in the Ministry of Education will avail their time to the Committee.

This side of the House has no problem with this motion and we concur with the request presented in this report. If it is true that your allowances are not being paid then you need to inform me about it. I do understand there are some committees that have somehow worked for free. I think that is not fair because the PER says that you ought to be rewarded for the time you serve in those committees. Please yell out without shouting but just come and tell us politely if your services have not been rewarded so that we can see what we can do about it. But thus far, I think it is only fair that we commend the Chairman and members of the Committee for the work you have done so far visiting all the provinces and putting the best of your time to be able to come up with a report that suits the purpose for which Parliament has tasked you to do. With those remarks I will stop here and support the motion. Thank you.

Hon. DEREK SIKUA (*Leader of Opposition*): I stand to first of all thank the Chairman of the Education and Human Resources Training Committee for moving this Motion. I would like to also convey and confirm the support that this side of the house has for the Motion simply because when the Education and Human Resources Training Committee asked for extension the first time, we did support the Motion for continuation of hearings in provinces around the country.

I think we have also heard some very encouraging and good reports coming from the provinces on the work of this very Committee that is looking at the issue of teacher absenteeism in the country. When the Committee conducted its hearings, a lot of our people in the provinces took the opportunity to also raise other issues not relating to teacher absenteeism but other issues they see as causing problems to our

education system. I have heard some provincial premiers and some of our leading citizens from the provinces being very appreciative of this Education Committee taking Parliament down to the rural areas and grassroots level. And so I would like to congratulate the Committee for a job well done.

Because the Committee has uncovered a whole plethora of issues that is wrong with our education system, I am really in support of this Motion by the Chair of the Education and Human Resources Training Committee. I say this because I am sure it is going to find quite a difficult task trying to separate what really relates to the reasons for teacher absenteeism and what are the separate issues in regards to the problems affecting our education system. I think that is part of the difficulty too in trying to separate the issues that have been raised by our people out there in the rural areas and therefore the time needed to really come up with a good report. Therefore, I think the time that is required for the very reasons that the Chair of the Education and Human Resources Training Committee mentioned and the need for them to have the whole group together to properly scrutinise the report so that in the end parliament has a report that fully reflects the reasons as to why teachers are absent from classes. The report is very important for our education planners and policy makers, especially the Minister whom I have not seen for the last couple of days inside here. I think the Prime Minister has explained the reasons for his absence and so we might accept the explanation of the Prime Minister as to why the Minister is absent.

I would also like to ask the Education and Human Resources Committee not to lose sight of the other issues raised by our people in the course of your hearings but take them up as well. I hope in your writing of the report mention those other issues somewhere so that those issues can be made available to our education policy makers and planners so that the issues do not get lost along the way.

With those comments, I would like to thank the mover again for moving this very important Motion. I thank the Government for its support and those of us from

this side of the House do not have any problem supporting the Motion. With that I support the Motion. Thank you very much.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU (*Leader of Independent*): I stand to also register the support of the Independent Group of the House with the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition to support the motion and the mover of the motion, the hardworking Chairman for the Education and Human Resources Training Committee.

The reasons for the Motion as outlined by the mover are clear and speak for themselves. The Committee definitely needs time because some members, as the Chairman has expressed are also members of all the other committees. In some of the Committees only a few of us would be sitting down until the evenings and this is a reminder to every in the Committee that it is a responsibility if you are a member of a committee, especially the Public Accounts Committee, the Bills and Legislation Committee and other Parliamentary Committees are very important.

The report of the Committee is very, very important and I have to register here that those of us who are members of the Education and Human Resources Training Committee have had the opportunity of hearing from our people, especially teachers who totalled up to more than 8,000 or 9,000 in numbers in this country. Teachers are more in number than public servants. Public servants are about 3,000 plus, but teachers are about 9,000 and to hear them coming out expressing themselves on how they deliver their responsibility on behalf of our Government to our children, and the environment created for them to teach in, is very interesting.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, there are a lot of issues that teachers have put to the Committee and if those issues are mentioned in the report or recorded and listed for our information would be also good to help our government, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and other ministries to take note of the important concerns and issues raised for the purpose of addressing them.

I see this Motion as appropriate in requesting that time be given to it so that the Committee edits and audits this important report before it is submitted to Parliament for the Ministry of Education to take up. I stand to accord my support on behalf of this side of the House on this motion because we do not see any problem with this motion.

Mr MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga*): I do not have much to say but we have to support this Motion because it is our responsibility to do so in order for the report to be released. But I am only sad that some of the recommendations in the report are not going to be in the budget of next year. This is a matter that was raised early in the year because we will go through the budget for next year and it is also the election year and so we will have a full year or maybe even two years before any recommendations coming out of the Committee's report would probably be substantively implemented. I suppose it is important for the Government to take them up in any supplementary that will come before the elections to try and address some of the issues that will be raised in the recommendation so that we do not have to wait for another two years before the recommendation are implemented.

Mr MILNER TOZAKA (*North Vella Lavella*): I would like to contribute a little bit to this motion and the first thing is I support the Prime Minister and also the Leader of Opposition for accepting this Motion. However, I would have thought that the Prime Minister or the Minister of Education should have spoken later because this report is from the Education Committee.

I remember we have already come up with an audit report on the absenteeism of teachers and I was hoping that with this motion, the Minister of Education or the supervising minister responds and informs of us what his Ministry is doing about this very important report. This side of the House understands that most of the issues are to do with how we manage our teachers in the provinces and also here in Honiara.

I was listening to some of the issues raised by our teachers to this Committee as very important which only circles around a couple of very important things, of which one is their conditions of service, their welfare - how we are taking care of them, especially their salaries and their condition services. We read about these issues and concerns in the newspapers because they always appear in the papers.

I have not gone through the budget yet but as the Member for Aoke/Langalanga said, are some of those concerns reflected in the budget. If they are in the budget then there is no need to wait for this report, there is no need to wait for this report that is going to come from the Education Committee; we do not have to. We need to be proactive on some of these things. I think it is unfair for the Prime Minister to tell us what is happening in the ministry. We would like to hear from the ministry itself in regards to that. There are many things happening in the ministry that I am not very happy about because some of my students at the University of Solomon Islands here, which I helped to pay for their school fees graduated wearing nice gowns and received their certificates or whatever it is that is in the envelope, but when they opened the envelope, it was absolutely empty; nothing inside, and this happens to about thousands of them.

What is this Mr Speaker and what does this means? They came back to me telling me that they received envelopes and there is nothing inside. And so the wearing of the gowns makes them happy and boosted their morale but when they opened the envelopes there was nothing inside. Just imagine what their feeling was when they saw that; it went really down, they were really upset.

I do not blame the Prime Minister for this, the Ministers or the Cabinet collectively. But I would like to ask the Minister of Education what is his reaction to this because he spoke very eloquently during that time but was he aware of what has happened? Man, this is very wrong, this is fraud, and everybody knows about this.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about this because we are leaders and we would like come out with this because education is very, very important and it is our priority. We will be saying priority again...

Hon. Manasseh Maelanga: Point of order. I just want to make a point of order on the MP for North Vella Lavella because he is starting to go out of the topic. The motion here is on the extension of the duration for the Education and Human Resources Training Committee to look more into the report to finalise it and present it before Parliament in the next sitting and so if the Member can stick to that area. He even went to the extent of touching SINU. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Thank you Deputy Prime Minister. I think he is still on the point and within the jurisdiction of education.

Mr Milner Tozaka: Thank you Mr Speaker and thank you Deputy Prime Minister for your intervention. I respect what you said but you have now disturbed my line of thinking and so do you want me to start again.

(laughter)

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Milner Tozaka: Let me say that I would like to take this opportunity to voice some of the concerns I have before the end of the year in regards to education. It is not a personal attack on anyone but it is for all of us to see our responsibilities collectively in working together making sure our people receive the best services that we are supposed to be delivering to them because if we do not voice these things they will be just put under the table again and will be never addressed. I am bringing this point, and I know they are sensitive and nobody wants to talk about

them because of our culture and the way we do things. But I would like to bring them up and this is where we can deal with them.

I support this motion that we give time to this Committee but I would like the Minister and his ministry not to wait for the report but to go ahead fixing these problems using perhaps the audit report on absenteeism as the benchmark for them to address issues, and I hope he has done that because he said that he is not going to wait for the report but his ministry is going to go ahead and fix the problem. And so I am very sorry that he is not available, his seat is empty but the Prime Minister said he has gone overseas and so I take that point. With those few points I support this motion.

Mr Peter Shanel Agovaka (*Central Guadalcanal*): Firstly, I would like to thank all honourable colleagues, in particular the Hon Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of Opposition, the honourable Leader of independent, the Member for Aoke/Langalanga and the Member for North Vella Lavella for their contributions to this motion.

The Committee has uncovered some serious issues and challenges in our education system. In regards to the content of this report, all the issues and submissions made by witnesses are tabulated in the report for Parliament's indulgence. This report contains recommendations that the Committee hopes will be taken seriously to address the many issues and challenges and also work on the gains that are already there in the education system of our country.

May I in passing just highlight that the Ministry of Education has recognised some of the challenges and one of the steps which the Ministry is doing and which I would like to highlight is the review of the Education Act in our country. With these few remarks I beg to move.

Motion agreed to.

BILLS

Bills – Second Reading

The 2014 Appropriation Bill 2013

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, as you have heard the Prime Minister announced that the second reading of the 2014 Appropriation 2013 will now commence on Monday 16th of December, 2013. I understand this was requested by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee due to the fact that it held its last hearing last night and therefore the PAC Report on the Bill is not yet available. I now call on the Prime Minister to move a motion of adjournment.

Hon Gordon Darcy Lilo: I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 9.54am