



FORTY-NINTH SESSION

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MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair at 10.00 a.m.

OPENING PRAYER

MADAM SPEAKER (N. RATTLE): Please be seated Honourable Members.

Honourable Members, our first business this morning is the reading of the Message from the Queen's Representative.

Message to Parliament – Royal Recommendation

This is signed by the Queen's Representative, His Excellency Tom Marsters.

Message No.1 reads:

“The Queen's Representative in pursuance of Article 3 of the Constitution on behalf of Her Majesty and in pursuance of Article 43 of the Constitution, recommends the Parliament to proceed upon the Bill, the Short Title whereof is the Appropriation Act 2018.

DATED at RAROTONGA this 20th Day of SEPTEMBER 2018.”

I now lay this on the Table.

Good morning to you all Members of Parliament who have entered the Parliament House this morning. Those of you who have been in this House for some time, and those of you who have just entered recently, I, along with the Clerk and the staff of Parliament welcome you.

As you will notice in front of us, our new Interpreters in the House – Mr Sonny Williams, Miss Kimiora Vogel, Papatua Papatua and Harris Isamaela under the training of Ta Vainerere as we train them to interpret in this Parliament.

I also welcome our friends in the public gallery this morning. Special welcome also to our people throughout the Cook Islands listening in this morning.

MADAM SPEAKER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

My first announcement this morning is, I have received a letter from the Honourable Prime Minister, for the appointment of the Honourable Tai Tura, as the Leader of the House effective as of 19 September 2018.

And following that is a letter from the Prime Minister in the appointment of the Honourable Tereapii Maki Kavana as the Government Whip effective as of the 19 September 2018.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend our many, many thanks to many Ministries of the Government for the assistance accorded to Parliament in pulling together, in the organising and the delivery of the very special occasion yesterday. Please bear with me as this was very important otherwise we wouldn't have had such a good day yesterday.

So, to begin with, I would like to recognise the Ministry of Culture, especially with the Secretary, as well as his staff with Terai and Rob in the preparations of the Auditorium yesterday. To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also with the work that was conducted by Kaka and all of the drivers who, as you would appreciate, transported all of us to the Auditorium yesterday. A wonderful job was done.

To the Cook Islands Police Service for the escort and the control of the traffic in enabling everybody to be able to do this work on time yesterday.

As we had the school children as guard of honour yesterday, I am sure we would like to thank the Ministry of Education for that service yesterday.

May I then bring together encompassing the uniform organisations that conducted their job yesterday. I also extend many thanks to the Theological College for the service and the beautiful Imene Tuki yesterday. To all our distinguished guests, the Aronga Mana, Koutu Nui and the Justices of the Peace and the whole of the community of the Cook Islands who attended the function yesterday, I thank you so much from the bottom of my heart.

Finally, I would like to thank our partner, UNDP, by the secondment of Adelle Khan who was very instrumental in supporting our staff in the preparations for yesterday. I extend the same appreciation to Debbie Angus, who many of you know has been our friend in being able to have a very successful day yesterday and, of course, the staff of Parliament for the commitment in making this a very successful day.

Honourable Members, please allow me if we could just take a bit of time to give our deepest condolences to people who are dear to Parliament as former Members of Parliament. I will go through a list of people I would like for us to recognise and acknowledge today and we will observe a two minutes silence at the completion of that.

First, we will begin with Papa Dan Kamana, a former leader of our country as a former Member of Parliament for Tupapa/Maraerenga.

Secondly, and I am sure like me and the staff of Parliament, we all miss the presence of our former Clerk, John Tangi who was a former Member of Parliament as well as the Clerk of Parliament until recently.

Papa Mataio Aperau, a former Member of Parliament for Matavera who also just recently passed.

And there was Mrs Moekopu Vogel, a very, very long-serving public servant in the Ministry of Agriculture who has worked with many of you in this House today.

And finally, Mama Numangatini Ariki of Mangaia who recently was brought home to be put to rest.

And equally so, we extend the condolences to all the families who are currently undergoing bereavement with families they have lost and we extend to them the deepest condolences of this House of Parliament.

We will now stand for two minutes silence and the Honourable Deputy Speaker will conduct us in a prayer.

(Two minutes silence and prayer)

MADAM SPEAKER: Please be seated. Thank you very much to the Honourable Deputy Speaker for our prayer.

We will now move on with the next business of the day and that is on the Presentation of the Bills. I beg your pardon, I am a bit emotional, speaking about the late Clerk John this morning has brought some very sad memories for me but nevertheless let's get on with the business.

We will move on to Question Time. I see the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa you have the Floor.

QUESTION TIME

MR V. TUPA: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I will pose my question to our Associate Minister of Agriculture. I know in the past when the Growers Association purchase equipment from overseas, it is normal for the tax associated with this purchase to be exempted but you have to be a registered entity under the law.

So my question to the Associate Minister of Agriculture is, now that there are Growers Associations purchasing equipment from overseas can this tax be exempted? The Matavera Growers Association is registered and we would like to know about tax exemption when purchasing machineries from overseas.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I see the Honourable Patrick Arioka, you have the Floor.

MR P. ARIOKA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Good morning to all of us on this beautiful morning. Kia Orana to the Opposition side for bringing forward their thoughts on this issue. In order to present the correct facts on this issue, may I request Madam Speaker if this can be deferred for a later time for me to ensure that my answer is correct.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, I see the Deputy Prime Minister.

HON. M. BROWN: Kia Orana Madam Speaker. This question from the Member for Matavera should be directed to the Minister of Finance and not to the Associate Minister of Agriculture because this question concerns the exemption of VAT. The laws of our country in taxation are very clear Madam Speaker and they are also fair for everybody.

You will recall in the Speech from the Throne that the Queen's Representative mentioned about agriculture and that we must do things in a different way. So the question is not whether we can get away with not paying any tax but how we can use the tax system to our benefit.

It is true that our Growers Associations are growing and they are producing and the level of income that is now starting to emerge from growers will exceed the VAT threshold for registration. So the benefit to the Growers Association Madam Speaker is to register as a VAT registered entity thereby you can claim against the VAT that you pay. Not only on capital items like machinery, tractors but also on consumables like fertilizer, fuel as a VAT registered entity you can claim back the VAT that you pay on all of these items.

I would be very happy Madam Speaker to welcome the Honourable Member from Matavera to speak with our officials in the Revenue Department to find out what benefits their organisation can gain from our tax system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I see the Honourable Tetangi Matapo, you have the Floor.

MRS T. MATAPO: Greetings, Madam Speaker on this beautiful morning.

My question is to the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands. Last year Honourable Prime Minister during our last meeting in this House, you said that you will give a bus for the island of Mangaia. My question to you Honourable Prime Minister therefore is this, what is happening to our bus?

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, I see the Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Honourable Member for Tamarua. I am surprise at this Honourable Member because she asked me in this House last term for the bus and because of her soft sweet voice, I agreed. I waited for her to follow up this request but she waited until this new term and this

sitting of the House to ask the question about the bus again. I think she wants the people to hear that she is asking again.

Don't be like that, when you ask, you have to follow it up and don't wait until we come back here and your people will hear that you are asking again. But the answer is still the same, even though the appropriation is before you, we can find ways to help the school children of Mangaia.

Thank you for asking the question again.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I see the Honourable Selina Napa, you have the Floor.

MRS S. NAPA: First of all greetings to everyone in this House.

I am not sure whether to direct my question to the Minister of Culture or the Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, I don't want to ask a question that will wait for another time to give a reply and not be answered today. My question is a simple and straight forward question. I want to give a background to my question and that is, in the past during the Te Maeva Nui event, the workers were not paid on time. My question therefore is whether all the workers of the recent Te Maeva Nui have been paid?

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I see the Honourable Minister George Angene.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Madam Speaker. Greetings to all Honourable Members. To the Leader of the Opposition side of the House, Kia Orana.

The question raised was, whether the staffs at the Ministry of Culture was paid during the current Te Maeva Nui festival because they weren't paid last year. I was not the Minister last year but I would like to assure you Honourable Member that all staff has been paid this year including the chartered vessels to bring our people from the Outer Islands and other expenses. The Ministry of Culture does not owe anyone.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I recognise the Honourable Terepai Maoate Jnr.

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Madam Speaker and good morning to all Honourable Members in this House.

My question is directed to the Honourable Minister George Angene. I am confused about the many speculations on Facebook and the media. Can you please confirm whether your Party is One Cook Islands or the Cook Islands Party?

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Honourable Member for Amuri. Your question is tempting me but I will answer your question. If you understand the meaning of the acronym OCIP, it means the Original Cook Islands Party. I want you to understand that. I am the Original Cook Islands Party and if you have further questions, I am more than happy to provide the answer. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable Terepai Maoate Jnr.

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Madam Speaker. Thank you Honourable Minister for your reply which enlightens me as to which Party your voters voted you during the General Election.

I have a supplementary question. I read your policy and I also heard you over the radio raising your concern and fighting against taxation on our old age pension.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Honourable Member for your supplementary question. About the tax on our old age pension, I have raised many concerns and arguments in the past which you were not aware and I will explain that in this House today so that all our people in the Cook Islands will hear me.

Last year, a meeting was held with our pensioners. In that meeting was myself, the Honourable Minister Rose Toki-Brown and also the Honourable Leader of the Opposition William Heather Jnr. I confirmed in that meeting that if become Coalition Government with the Democratic Party, we will remove taxation on our pensioners. I think you will understand where I stand now. I am not with the Democratic Party. What I said during that time was minuted and two weeks ago, I held another meeting with our pensioners. The same question was asked to me during that meeting and they understood me. They agreed what I had explained to them and my intentions should I successfully form a Coalition Government with the Democratic Party.

However, today I am coalition with the Cook Islands Party Government but I will continue to look at this issue.

During the time of the former Prime Minister Jim Marurai, some agreements were put in place regarding the old age pension. There were discussions whether Cook Islanders collecting the Old Age Pension would be taxed in New Zealand or here in the Cook Islands. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Before I give you the Floor Honourable Member, may I just explain. When you ask a supplementary question, it must be supplementary to the original question because the tax issue was not part of the first question. So remember, if you want to make a supplementary question it must not change the topic of discussions of the first question.

I will give the Floor to the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera.

MR T. TUAVERA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to all Honourable Members in this House this morning.

I like the Ministers reply. He can't confirm whether he's One Cook Islands Party or Cook Islands Party.

I read the speech from the Queen's Representative yesterday and it's good to know that there was mention about Fishing, Agriculture and everything was in it. My question to the Minister of Finance is this. During our campaign, the candidate for

the Cook Islands Party in Ngatangia said, vote for me and the roads in Ngatangia will be completed as soon as we become Government because the ball is in my hands.

My question to you Minister is, when is the road work taking place in Ngatangia. Every year, there is always an allocation to widen our roads in Ngatangia. You have always claimed that you will hold a meeting. The meeting is done and everything is in place. The width of the roads has been marked. When are you going to give us the money to do the road works in Ngatangia? We have night markets in Ngatangia and if there is an emergency somewhere along either side of Ngatangia, the fire truck and the ambulance cannot get through because the cars are parked on both sides of the road. I have tried my best to buy cones to put on both sides. I believe that will be tested on one of these nights Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. R. TAPAITAU: Kia Orana Madam Speaker. I would like to answer the question posed to the Minister of Finance which was raised by the Honourable Member for Ngatangia.

Before I answer the question, I would like to greet all Honourable Members in this House and also to those in the public gallery.

I know you've been complaining about the road situation in Ngatangia for a while. That same question was asked to the former Deputy Prime Minister and the former Minister for Infrastructure.

Come to this day, there is a new Minister for Infrastructure and I welcome you to come and see me so we can address this issue for Ngatangia.

We have plans in place to do the road for Ngatangia but we are still sorting out a few issues that we need to get by and that can be remedied by your assistance.

Kia Orana and Kia manuia.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question and I give the Floor to the Honourable Member Toti Tupa.

MR V. TUPA: Madam Speaker I would like to make a supplementary remark to the Minister of Infrastructure.

Honourable Minister, please consider other areas as well and not just Ngatangia. Please start from the head of Tangia's fish all the way to the tail of Tangia's fish.

My question then is, are you going to start the road work from Matavera all the way to Teimurimotia? Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I see the Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. R. TAPAITAU: Kia Orana again Madam Speaker. I knew the Honourable Member for Matavera will also ask the same question because I live in Matavera. But he must not forget that my grandfather also come from the village of Tupapa.

But in all seriousness, we have a plan, Infrastructure does have a plan and we will be executing that plan according to where we want to go so rest assured Matavera, Ngatangia and all the villages on Rarotonga, we will go around and do all the roads. Hence to doing all these, there needs to be other preparations before the road works begin. It will be a waste of time if we do not attend to these little issues before starting the major road work. At the moment, there are failures in the roads that need to be addressed urgently. From there, we will go forward in that direction.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I see the Honourable Member Kitai, you have the Floor.

MR M. KITAI: Thank you Madam Speaker. My question is to the Honourable Prime Minister.

Can the Prime Minister please advise this House when the Sunday flights to Aitutaki will stop? When I was asked this question, I told my people I'm not representing my Church or my Party in Parliament. I am representing the people of on my island.

I know that a referendum was done in Aitutaki. When this was done there were a lot of people against it.

My question again to the Prime Minister, when is the Sunday flights to Aitutaki going to cease. Aitutaki was told the referendum must be done first and the result will tell us what we will do afterwards.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. H. PUNA: Greetings Honourable Member from Vaivaitau. Thank you for the beautiful question. I think that is one of the reasons why you won the seat in your constituency. So I encourage you, not to advance this issue. This is not the first time this question has been raised in this House and I am happy to repeat the answer to that question.

I have spoken about this matter especially during the by-election in the Vaipae Hall. I have explained the limitations of the referendum under our Constitution. There is a clause that includes, "we can keep our day of worship to our own choice." Our freedom of religion is guaranteed under the Constitution.

Therefore the Government or Island Government does not have any right to intervene into anyone's choice of their holy day and one person cannot intervene on the choice of someone on the day they choose to be their worship day. There is the deep meaning of this clause – religious freedom. It has been told that if we really want to

know what each person thinks and wants then the referendum will show that and it has been shown like you've said. However under our Constitution we cannot dictate or tell someone what their holy day should be, whether it's Sunday or Saturday or how they should worship.

There's my answer to the question Honourable Member. We will be breaking our own Constitution if we force this upon somebody. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Members. That completes our Question Time.

We will now go to Presentation of Bills.

PRESENTATION OF BILLS

First up is the Justices of the Peace Amendment Bill 2017.

I now call on the Minister Rose Brown to present the Bill.

DEPUTY CLERK AT THE TABLE (H. MAUNGA): Short Title Reads: Justices of the Peace Amendment Act 2018.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Can the Minister please name the date and the time of the Second Reading of the Bill?

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: After the Appropriation Bill 2018.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Justices of the Peace Amendment Bill 2018 is ordered for the Second Reading after the Appropriation Bill.

The second Bill is the Law Practitioners Bill 2018.

DEPUTY CLERK AT THE TABLE: Short Title Reads: Law Practitioners Act 2018.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Can the Minister please name the date and the time of the Second reading of the Bill?

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: After the Appropriation Bill 2018.

MADAM SPEAKER: Would that be after the Justices of the Peace?

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: After the Justices of the Peace.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Law Practitioners Act 2018 will be placed for Second reading after the Justices of the Peace Amendment Bill 2018.

I now call on the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Minister Mark Brown to present the Appropriation Bill 2018.

DEPUTY CLERK AT THE TABLE: Short Title Reads: Appropriation Act 2018.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Can the Minister please name the date and the time of the Second Reading of the Bill?

HON. M. BROWN: Forthwith Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. The Appropriation Act 2018 is placed for Second reading forthwith.

Thank you.

We will now go to Presentation of Papers.

PAPERS FOR PRESENTATION

I now call on the Honourable Minister Vaine Mokoroa to present Paper 1, Paper 5 and Paper 6.

HON. V. MOKOROA: Good morning Madam Speaker and Colleagues in this Honourable House.

It is with honour that I present to Parliament on this day:

**Parliament Paper 1 – Employment Relations (Minimum Rate of Pay)
Regulations 2018, Serial No. 2018/03**

**Parliament Paper 5 – International Labour Organisations (ILO)
Submissions to Parliament**

**Parliament Paper 6 – International Labour Organisations (ILO)
Ratification of Conventions 182 and 144**

I now lay these on the Table.

Madam Speaker, if I may speak briefly on these Papers, particularly on the ILO Ratification of 182 and 144.

As part of our International Labour Organisation membership obligations and activities, we hereby notify the Honourable Members of Parliament of our recent ratification of two new International Labour Organisation Conventions. Convention 182 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of worst forms of child labour. Convention 144 concerning tripartite consultations to promote the implementation of the International Labour standards.

Until recently 181 out of the 187 ILO member States had ratified convention number 182. Ratification by the remaining six countries will create a historical milestone for the world as this will be the first ever global convention to be ratified. By ratifying the Convention number 182, the Cook Islands joins the rest of the international community in sending a clear message domestically and internationally that children all over the world should be protected and rescued from the worst forms of child labour.

Convention No. 144 encourages the application of a founding principle of ILO by bringing together Governments, employers and workers through tripartite social dialogue to develop, implement and promote international labour standards governing all aspects of the world of work.

A total of 139 ILO member States have ratified Convention No. 144 promoting a culture of dialogue between the tripartite actors, building trust, collaboration on social and labour policies and creating effective national social dialogue and tripartite institution to shape the future of work.

Extensive consultations were carried out nationally and stakeholders from both the private and public sector were in support of this ratification process. Upon approval from Cabinet the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration rescinded the respective instruments of ratification to the ILO Headquarters on 8 August 2018.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Minister. We will now go to the consideration of the Appropriation Bill on the Second reading forthwith.

I now call on the Minister of Finance the Honourable Mark Brown to move the Motion on the Second reading of the Bill.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move:

That the Appropriation Bill be now read a Second time

With your indulgence Madam Speaker I will now speak on the principles and merits of the Bill. Before that Madam Speaker, I would like to give greetings to the three pillars of society that we always greet.

To the Government side, the Head of State of the country the Queen's Representative, to the Ministers of the Crown, to the Opposition side of this House and also our Local Government.

All the Religious organisations in our country, I say greetings to you all. I also give greetings to our Ui Ariki, Ui Mataiapo and Ui Rangatira, Kia Orana to you all. Our people living on Rarotonga and also in the Outer Islands who are listening to the radio today, I say Kia Orana to you all.

I give special greetings to my constituency of Takuvaine and Tutakimoa. To my parents at home who are listening to the radio and the budget speech, Kia Orana to all of you.

Madam Speaker, today I am delighted to announce to you all a budget that is dedicated to all of our people and to our country as a whole. Today, I present again the people's budget.

This is a Government that looks after its people Madam Speaker and this budget will reflect that as I go through it today.

Firstly, Madam Speaker the budget being tabled today reflects the progress that the nation has made since this Government has been in office. It highlights an economy that is experiencing strong growth so much so that it is possible that we may soon be classified as a high income country, an economy that in turn is generating a consistent stream of revenue and a Government that is handling this revenue responsibly by closely managing growth in Government expenditure.

As you may have seen recently visitor numbers to the Cook Islands are continuing to break records with more than 18,000 visitors just for July this year. This is excellent news for all those Cook Islands businesses servicing the tourism market. It is also good news for the economy as a whole with tourism businesses experiencing strong growth there is more money in the economy to boost other sectors such as construction and retail.

As such the Government believes that the time is now right to focus on infrastructure and Government structures that are required to steer the nation towards achieving the national sustainable development plan, to raise the quality of life for Cook Islanders and to prevent capacity constraints such as housing and skilled labour shortages from affecting the economy.

Today, Madam Speaker I announce a budget that provides a strong fiscal position while addressing key areas of need in the Cook Islands. Again this budget intends to improve the livelihood of both current and future generations by making our country more resilient to future economic shocks and natural disasters.

The Government has made and will continue in this budget to make positive efforts to get the economic settings right, the ones that we can influence in order to support economic growth and this includes investing in critical community infrastructure, ensuring a competitive business environment and perhaps the most important responsibly and sustainably managing our nation's finance.

Madam Speaker, the Government has committed to strengthening the strategic focus of its expenditure and tax decisions by incorporating a more robust medium term perspective that takes into account interactions with the economy. Once developed, the framework will include three key pieces of information, macroeconomic indicators for the medium term including forecast for expenditure and revenue, fiscal target and an analysis of those fiscal risks.

A key aim of the medium term fiscal framework will be to smooth Government expenditure over the course of the economic cycle so that in the case of an economic down turn the Government will be able to maintain its current level of expenditure over the short term despite lower revenue collections. This approach will help deliver macroeconomic stability, will encourage private investment and entrench low public debt.

In the interim, for this 2018-19 Budget, Madam Speaker the Government has developed a mildly expansionary budget that balances the economic context (and subsequent capacity constraints) with the need for improvements in core Government operations and the state of some of the nation's key infrastructure.

Small increases in operating expenditure had been more than offset by estimate increases in operating revenue, resulting in expected strong operating balances for the foreseeable future.

These healthy operating balances Madam Speaker will be utilised by the Government to continue its ambitious capital program, without requiring new external financing.

In the next four years the Government plans to complete Te Mato Vai, commence and complete the Manatua Cable project, finish the Southern Group Renewable Energy Project, commence the Mei Te Vai Ki Te Vai sanitation project and start the construction of cyclone shelters in many of our Northern Pa Enea islands. Despite this ambitious capital program, the Government is expecting a return to fiscal surplus in the 2019-20 year, one year earlier than committed to in our half year economic Fiscal Update.

Madam Speaker, the strong fiscal position has allowed Government to pursue responsible debt levels, with no new loans committed to in the 2018-19 Budget. I am proud to say that the Cook Islands is a leading example in the Pacific in terms of managing its debt finances. Our current debt commitment remains well below the 35 percent threshold agreed to through our fiscal responsibility ratios.

Due to some project delays, drawdowns of some existing commitments have been deferred, resulting in a shift in the debt profile over the forward estimates. Net debt is now expected to peak at about 26 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in 2018-19, before decreasing to 19 per cent in 2021-22 financial year.

Finally, I will discuss the Government's cash reserves as outlined in this Budget. The Government now estimates significant cash reserves this year and the forward estimates, well above our required fiscal responsibility ratios. While some of this cash will be utilised to complete capital works, capital constraints prevent us from undertaking all of the required capital works at one time.

Instead, as a part of the Medium-term Fiscal Framework, the Government will establish a 'buffer fund', to set aside money to allow us to continue to fund operations and capital projects during periods of economic downturn, when revenues may decrease.

Expenditure

Madam Speaker if I can please move on and inform our people of the Government's appropriations for this Budget year. As I stated at the beginning of my speech, this is a budget for all of our people, our Nation as a whole. I will begin with our Children, as they are our leaders of tomorrow.

Child Benefit Extension

Madam Speaker, this Government recognises the impact of the high costs of participating in secondary education on Cook Islands families. To address this, the Government will increase the age of the child benefit from the current 0-12 to 0-16 years old over a period of two years. As of 1 October 2018, only a few weeks away, the child benefit age will be extended to under 14 years.

As of July 2019, the start of the next Financial Year, the Government will provide additional funds to accommodate the age extension of the child benefit to under 16 years. This will provide additional funding to families to enable them to attend to their children's basic necessities.

Coordinator for Children's National Policy

To further support children and their development, funding has been provided to the Social Policy and Services Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for personnel to provide effective coordination of national activities and action plans under the National Children's Policy.

Family Protection and Support Manager

Following the successful passing of the Family Law Act 2017 by this Government, funding has been provided for a Family Protection and Support Manager at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This person will carry out the new responsibilities that are required under the Family Law Act relating to Care and Protection. This will enable our children and families to seek assistance and support from Internal Affairs.

Remedial Programs

Our children continue to be the main focus of the Government, Madam Speaker. And in this Budget the Government is providing support for a remedial education program to support those children facing difficulties at school. It is expected that the program will help to keep these children engaged in the education system. The funding will cover remedial tutors that will each service a number of schools.

Centre of Excellence in Information Technology

Madam Speaker to secure our country's successful participation in an increasingly competitive world, we must invest in our educational system and provide opportunities for our youth to excel. This Government will contribute \$300,000 over 2 years, before decreasing its contributions to \$60,000 thereafter, towards the development of a Centre of Excellence in Information Technology.

Already an MOU has been signed between the Cook Islands Government and the Government of India and space has been made available at USP Cook Islands to accommodate the Centre. To ensure the sustainability of the Centre of Excellence, a local person has been identified to work alongside the Centre's establishers, with a view to taking over Directorship of the Centre in the medium-term.

In addition to expenditure focused on upholding the lives of our children, the Government has increased its focus on our people living in the Pa Enea.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Minister may I interrupt you, please. As it is our lunch break to keep the message tidy. We will now suspend Parliament and return at 12.00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 11.30 a.m.

Parliament resumed at 12.00 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: Please be seated. Welcome back Honourable Members.

Parliament is resumed.

I've just been asked if I could just say when you speak just not too fast so the Interpreters can capture, especially when you are reading. The Minister is doing well. He's well aware of that but to our new Members of Parliament; please if you have to read from your paper, don't read fast but slowly so our Interpreters can understand you.

Before we went to lunch, there was an interruption of the principles and merits speech from the Honourable Minister and I will now give you the Floor again.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker.

To continue on, I will turn to the minimum wage. On 1st July 2017, this Government increased the minimum wage from \$6.25 per hour to \$7 per hour. This year the same Government increased the minimum wage again from \$7 to \$7.25 per hour to further address the cost of living pressures faced in the Cook Islands. Today, we will appropriate funding to allow the Government to meet its obligations to public servants earning the minimum wage and this significantly benefits Government workers especially in our Pa Enea.

In August of this year, Madam Speaker, we celebrated the 53rd Te Maeva Nui festival. All of the people of the Cook Islands celebrated together, including our Northern and Southern Pa Enea and our families from New Zealand, Australia and around the world all returned home to celebrate. Together we portrayed our passion for our culture and celebrated the importance of self-Government and these celebrations are important, Madam Speaker. They allow us to strengthen our kinship, our culture and our unique identity as Cook Islanders and I am delighted that this Government stood firm in its vision for the 53rd Te Maeva Nui Celebration making it one of the best ever. We value the importance of getting together as a nation to unite on special occasions such as this.

Under the strong leadership of this Government, an additional \$84,000 will be put towards the Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen collaboration and partnerships between the Ministry and the Pa Enea Island Governments. This program intends to build capacity in the Southern Group by providing training to local planters in order to empower them to meet the demand for agricultural products from the Pa Enea. We have seen agriculture expanding in the Pa Enea thanks to the fertile soils and greater availability of land. This funding will help to ensure that this expansion and growth continues.

Our Pa Enea Funding Model, Madam Speaker, aims to determine the appropriate level of cash funding for each of the Outer Islands Governments. The system was first introduced in the 2012-13 Budget to ensure a fairer level of basic service delivery. In this financial year, a review of the funding formula was undertaken, particularly focusing on the funding provided for each parameter as inflation had not previously been considered. While the full review is not yet complete, this Government has decided to increase the total funding formula cap by 4 per cent to go some way towards considering inflation in the Pa Enea since 2012-13 and it is anticipated that further changes will be made going forward once the review of the funding model is complete.

Madam Speaker, it is important to note that this Government is also making an effort to improve our international presence.

The Cook Islands has economic ties to Fiji through the import and export of goods, through communications and through transport links. Fiji is a regional hub for diplomatic missions of numerous countries and also hosts the regional offices of many of our key multi-lateral partners. By establishing a Cook Islands mission in Fiji, this will allow our country to have more direct interactions with key partners, increase the Cook Islands influence within the region and expand trade and economic opportunities both in, and with, the main Pacific regional hub.

New Senior Immigration Officers

I turn to new Senior Immigration Officers and in order to address the pressures on immigration to deliver fast and efficient services, funding has been provided to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration to fund two Senior Immigration Officers to undertake the regulatory functions of immigration and border security.

I turn to Health Madam Speaker.

As a Government, we have been committed to improving the health of our people and promoting healthy lifestyles in order for the people of the Cook Islands to achieve their aspirations. To this end, Government has increased the baseline funding for the Ministry of Health by \$1.4 million to allow them to achieve this commitment.

In addition to the above, Madam Speaker, we are also taking steps to improve the capacity within Government.

Establishment of the Ministry of Corrective Services

This Budget will establish a new Ministry of Corrective Services. The new Ministry will take on the Probation and Prison Services output from the Ministry of Justice. This arrangement will allow more efficient and effective service delivery of our Probation and Prison Services and also free up the Ministry of Justice to focus on its core roles. To ensure continuity, the new Ministry will utilise the Ministry of Justice's 2018 Business Plan.

Economic Utilities Regulator

Madam Speaker, in order for our country to benefit from the substantial investments that this Government is making in improving the Cook Islands essential service infrastructure – clean, reliable water from Te Mato Vai, increased and more affordable access to internet broadband from the Manatua Cable, and sustainable electricity supply from our renewable energy projects – this Government will be looking to establish a Public Utilities Regulator. The Regulator will ensure efficient, fair and transparent pricing of utility services in the telecommunications, electricity and water and sanitation sectors in the long-term interests of Cook Islands consumers.

Post Tax Amnesty

As we all know, in last year's Budget the Government implemented a Tax Amnesty. The Amnesty has been very successful in encouraging taxpayers that had disengaged from our taxation system to reach out to our Revenue Management Division. As a result, we are now collecting revenue that would not have otherwise been collected.

But, Madam Speaker, there is further work to do. In this Budget we have provided additional one-off funding to the Revenue Management Division to increase community engagement and ensure that all taxpayers are being treated equally.

Revenue

In revenue, Madam Speaker, today I announce no further changes to the Government's revenue policy for this Budget. Strong revenues are estimated now and in the future particularly in the form of taxation. These revenues are largely derived from tourists during their time in the Cook Islands in the form of VAT. Let's ensure though that we are spending the revenues collected on projects that will add to the capacity of the Cook Islands' economy to better serve our vital tourism industry.

Capital

I turn to Capital, Madam Speaker and this Budget continues this Government's ambitious capital plan by providing a Capital budget of \$44.5 million for this year and \$43 million for the next financial year and the priority investment areas reflected in this year's Budget remain largely unchanged since the previous Budget with a focus on climate change resilience by building cyclone shelters in our Pa Enea, completing our renewable energy projects in the southern Pa Enea, improving roads on Rarotonga and also in the Pa Enea, commencing the sanitation project Mei Te Vai Ki Te Vai,

strengthening the bridges around Rarotonga and improving the Rarotonga water system by completing Te Mato Vai.

The Manatua Submarine Cable remains a high priority for this Government, although delays for in the project that shifted out the expenditure profile. This project will be implemented alongside other significant projects such as Mei Te Vai Ki Te Vai and the Vaikapuangi Building. These major projects have been spread out over the forward period to ensure we have the capacity to fully implement and complete them.

Madam Speaker, all of the capital projects selected by this Government are expected to improve the quality of life for all Cook Islanders while at the same time increasing our economic development.

Finally, Madam Speaker I would like to acknowledge the assistance from our foreign partners that provide financial support in the form of official development assistance. Some of our key projects are able to be completed with the help of our partners New Zealand, China, the European Union, Japan and the various United Nations organisations. This year it is estimated that we will receive 61 million dollars in official development assistance the majority of which will fund our ambitious capital projects such as Te Mato Vai and the Manatua cable.

In the coming year we will learn the outcome of the OECD's determination on whether the Cook Islands will graduate from Official Development Assistance. The Government is currently developing a fiscal plan and should graduation occur this will be incorporated into the Government's Medium Term Fiscal Framework.

Madam Speaker, I would like to declare that this budget reinforces this Government's desire to establish a strong and developed country for our children and our children's children.

Today, just as in recent past budgets this Government announces strong economic growth, strong revenues and a proactive spending for our people. We are living well within our means with this Government delivering positive operating balances and expenditure initiatives for every member of our society year after year.

To reflect our dedication to strong fiscal management, Madam Speaker this Government is delivering fiscal surpluses earlier than previously committed providing us with financial stability and security for the future.

This Government, Madam Speaker has managed again as it has in the last years to provide the House with prudent levels of Crown debt, well maintained Crown net worth and responsible management of fiscal risks against the Crown. This, Madam Speaker is a budget for all of our nation, this I table before you today is the people's budget. Kia Orana, Kia Manuia.

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Minister. I will now seek a Secunder for the Motion that was moved for the Second reading of the Appropriation Bill please. I see the Honourable Prime Minister.

Secinded by the Honourable Prime Minister

We will now go to the adjournment of the budget debate and I call on the Leader of the House.

MR T. TURA: Madam Speaker, I would like to propose that the Honourable Members have the opportunity over the weekend to consider the details of the Estimate documents that have just been tabled and prepared for the debate next week and that we continue with the Address in Reply debate this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, I move:

That this debate be adjourned and to be continued at the Sitting of this House at 2.00 p.m. on Monday, 24 September 2018

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you for the Motion. Just so we are clear we are now deferring the debate on the Budget on the message that has been presented and the Books that you have now referred till Monday so you will have time, we will be sitting at 2 o'clock on Monday, that's our regular sitting time so you will be able to look at the Books over the weekend when we return we will begin on the debate on the budget. Is that all clear and that is the Motion on the floor.

Our regular sitting Monday to Thursday is 1:00 p.m. I beg your pardon could you please move the Motion and correct it till 1:00 p.m.

MR T. TURA: Thank you, Madam Speaker I think there is some misunderstanding going around the House. I move:

This debate be adjourned and to be continued at the Sitting of this House at 1.00 p.m. on Monday, 24 September 2018

MADAM SPEAKER: Just for your understanding when a Motion is moved in the House and it has not been seconded you can change that Motion straight away as we have just done. So, the Motion reads just as previously read with just the change of the time from 2:00pm to 1:00pm.

Thank you for bringing that to my attention and I see the Honourable Minister George Angene on the Floor.

Secinded by the Honourable Minister, George Angene

The Question is:

That the debate on the Second reading of the Appropriation Bill be adjourned and to be continued at the sitting of this House at 1.00 p.m. on Monday, 24 September 2018

Motion agreed to

MADAM SPEAKER: We will now go back to Orders of the Day on the Address in Reply and I call on the Prime Minister.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I move:

That a respectful address be presented to His Excellency the Queen's Representative in reply to His Excellency's speech from the Throne

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Can I have a Seconder for the Motion please?

Seconded by the Leader of the House, Honourable Tai Tura

I call upon the Prime Minister to speak on the Motion please.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to you and your staff. Kia Oran also to our new Interpreters today. Our people are familiar with these voices because they hear them during national events in our country. Our people can also hear the nervousness in these voices, maybe because of the new environment.

Special greetings to all our Honourable Members in this House. To all the Government Members, to Ministers of the Crown, Kia Orana to you all. Kia Orana also to the Leader of the Opposition and to all the Honourable Members of the Opposition.

I would like to convey special greetings to our people Madam Speaker. Thank you to all our people and families who supported us and especially our new Members of Parliament on the first sitting day of Parliament on Wednesday, and also the Ceremonial Opening of Parliament yesterday, Thursday. It is heart warming to see all the new faces in our House. I think this is the first time we've had many new faces in our Parliament. I counted 11 new faces in our House. However, we have two former Members of Parliament who have returned to our House again. I would like to convey special greetings to you all. I know your families and supporters are proud of the hard work they achieved to enable you to represent them in this Honourable House.

This is the first time I know of the tremendous support given by our people during the first sitting of Parliament on Wednesday and also the Ceremonial Opening yesterday. Therefore, to all our new Honourable Members, I say congratulations and welcome to the Honourable House of our country.

I would also like to extend my greetings to our former Members of Parliament who have served our country for a very long time, and now have departed from their Parliamentary roles. I believe during their tenure in Parliament as representatives for their constituencies, they served our country well and also other areas they were

affiliated with. I therefore greet them in the name of our Lord and wish them the very best in their future endeavours.

I also extend special greeting to the two former Members of Parliament who has been in this House before and now has returned. To the Honourable Member for Amuri/Ureia, Terepai Maoate Jnr who is back in the House again. I also acknowledge the Honourable Member for Ivirua. He was the only Member of Parliament who won his seat but due to health issues, he was never sworn in the House until now. I notice he's not in the House today, maybe he's not well. I however send special greetings to you two Honourable Members.

I would also like to extend special greetings to the Honourable Member of Parliament for Tengtangi/Ngatiarua/Areora. I can almost say that this is a new record for the Parliament of the Cook Islands. She is the youngest Member of Parliament elected to represent a constituency in our Parliament. We are almost the same age, 22 years old. Special congratulation to you Honourable Member and well done.

In addition Madam Speaker, I would also like to advise Honourable Members of this House that I intend to bring to this House in the future an amendment Act to repeal the unacceptable current Act which requires Government workers to resign from their jobs in order to stand for Parliament. This is not appropriate. We understand we have a democracy Government and it's our democratic right to stand and represent our people. I always feel sorry for public servants who want to stand as a Member of Parliament but hesitate because it would mean resigning from their jobs. Therefore, I would like to ask all Honourable Members of Parliament in this House to support the Amendment Bill when it comes to this House.

Madam Speaker, I would like at this time to send special greetings to these three Honourable Members, the Honourable Member from Tupapa, Tongareva and Teenui/Mapumai. The Queen's Representative rightly mentioned in his speech yesterday that this is a Coalition Government. This means this is a new venture for this country today. I would like to thank the three Honourable Members who agreed to form a Coalition Government with the Cook Islands Party today and for the rest of the four years ahead of us. I also extend special appreciation to their committee members and supporters in their constituencies. Although this is a new undertaking for us, I strongly believe if we continue to work together and remain as one, we will be able to build a strong and firm Government today.

Madam Speaker, I would now like to send my greetings to our home island Manihiki. Kia Orana to all my people on Manihiki. To Mama Mayor, Deputy Mayor and all the Council Members, to the Ministers of various denominations and to all our people on our island, Kia Orana to you all in the name of our Lord.

Madam Speaker, as you mentioned earlier on, I would also like to extend my sincere condolences to all the bereaved families on the island of Manihiki who lost their loved ones during the last couple of days.

First to our mama Moeroa John. Mama Moeroa worked as a nurse on the island of Manihiki. I would like to send our words of condolences to Papa John and to all the families on Manihiki and also here in Rarotonga and abroad. I also extend my

condolences to young Papa Mato who passed away last Friday. This is quite a shock because he was here during the Te Maeva Nui celebrations. What was comforting is that he knew he was unwell and decided to return home quickly. He was supposed to go to New Zealand for medical treatment. We are therefore comforted that he is now buried beside his late wife on the island of Manihiki.

Lastly Madam Speaker is our Papa Tobia Kaitara who passed away last Sunday. It's very sad because this Papa is one of the last surviving members of our old people on our island. I am connected to this Papa through Party affiliation because he is the patron for the Cook Islands Party on the island of Manihiki. I am saddened that I was unable to attend his burial on the island. To all the children, Papa Luka and all the families on Manihiki, here in Rarotonga, New Zealand and Australia, I would like to send my sincere condolences to you all. God bless you.

Madam Speaker, I will now come back to the Address from the Queen's Representative yesterday. As I mentioned yesterday, it was a beautiful message. I would say that the message yesterday gave a road map for our country for the next four years. The intentions of Government for the next four years were mentioned in the speech. The speech cannot focus on a few Government efforts only and not its entirety. This is the reason the speech from the Queen's Representative took a very long time. I think we will all agree that the Queen's Representative covered all areas of our country in his speech.

Madam Speaker, I would like to bring an important point to the House. The Queen's Representative started his speech by mentioning a secret in order to enhance the development of our country. The Queen's Representative mentioned that we can only improve our country by working together in this House, in Government and also with our people. This is the secret and I support that this is appropriate for us Honourable Members of this House to take to heart. We must realise the importance of working together in this House, in Government and with our people.

Honourable Members, on Wednesday we conducted the swearing in of our Honourable Members in this House. We pledged that we will carry and discharge our duties as Honourable Members of the House with dignity. My belief Madam Speaker is that, on this issue we are not coming into the House to cause debate and also to argue with each other but I do believe that this House should become a place of dialogue, a stage where we come together to deliberate on actions that are useful for the development of our nation. We also need a change of culture in this House. We should not treat this House like a rugby field but a place where we dialogue and exchange ideas so that we can all move our development agenda forward.

This is what we have pledged and that is our priority to this House. We can only achieve what we have pledged if we truly co-operate. It is not that we will always support all the proposals of the Government – no. But at the same time it is not right for the Opposition to always oppose every proposal the Government puts forward. I would like to humbly request that with all the proposals we put forward, we would like to receive your support and your creative ideas so we can move forward. Here is an example Madam Speaker.

The Appropriation Bill has been presented to us today. Yes, the Honourable Minister of Finance has shared all the positive elements of this Budget but you have a responsibility as the Opposition to have a look at all the faulty sides of this Budget and the direction has been set in the presentation by the Queen's Representative during the opening ceremony of our Parliament yesterday. It's up to you to have a look and examine whether the allocations according to this road map are actually appropriate. If it's not suitable, don't just oppose it. Please contribute to how we can correct all the issues that you have identified. That is how I propose that we should adjust our culture within this Honourable House.

Therefore, I believe our Parliament will be very enjoyable but I see that it is going to be boring because James Beer is not here and the quiet assassin from Mitiaro. This is just to have some joy.

Therefore Madam Speaker that is the key emphasis of my contribution to the House this afternoon. However, I would like to allocate more time to all our new Members who are able to deliver their maiden speeches so we can give them the time to do so.

I, therefore, Madam Speaker leave it here in supporting the Reply to the Address from the Throne.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister.

I will propose the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

The Secunder could have had the opportunity and if it's okay with you, we will give the time to the Honourable Member from Nukuroa.

May I just say before he starts, you have 30 minutes each to speak to the Reply to the Address by the Queen's Representative.

MR T. TANGATAPOTO: Madam Speaker, your staff in this Honourable House, greetings to you in the name of our Lord.

Our Honourable Members, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers and all the Honourable Members of the Opposition, the Government side, to all of us in this House – greetings in the name of our Lord.

Madam Speaker, with your indulgence I would like to greet the people in my constituency before I return to the matter under debate.

Special greetings to my people who are listening in to our broadcast this afternoon. Firstly, to all our traditional leaders – Temaue Teikamata Ariki, Tetava Ariki and Tou Ariki and also to all our governors, to all the Mataiapo and Rangatira, to those of you holding our traditional titles on the island – greetings in the name of our Lord.

To our three churches on the island and church Ministers and to all the members of the churches – greetings in the name of our Lord.

To our leader, the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, the Island Council Members, the Clerk of the Island Council and the Clerk of the Aronga Mana and also to all our public servants on our island – greetings in the name of our Lord.

I believe I haven't forgotten to mention anybody on our island in my greetings to you this afternoon. I also would like to convey special acknowledgement to some important people who were responsible for putting me into this House. They are called the tribe of love on the island of Mitiaro. To the Chairman of our Committee and also to the members of the Committee, to our elders, to all the Mama and the Papa as well as the young people and also our children, thank you for your hard work in ensuring that I represent you in this House and I say thank you very much to you all.

Madam Speaker, Mitiaro is the only island I know that everybody is involved in politics including the babies. I noticed they distance themselves from each other based on their party affiliations.

I also would like to greet our other tribe known as the family of humility. To their leaders and supporters and the young people, greetings to you all in the name of our Lord.

I also would like to acknowledge two of my special supporters who are very much behind my success in the general election. Our village of Mangarei don't have a Ariki but I would like to refer to Maarametua Kimiora as the Council of our village and I acknowledge him today for what he has done for me and also to my older brother Tere, special greetings to you both.

I promised during my campaign that when I become a Member of Parliament, I will reside with my people during my term of Parliament. I believe this is the right thing to do, to live with my people so that I will know and understand their needs. Therefore I promise that I will remain a strong and humble servant for my people during this term of Parliament.

My people, I know you don't like hearing all these lengthy greetings, maybe this is the only time I will greet you and after that I believe I will put my effort into my work.

Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge some people residing here in Rarotonga. These are important people who have supported me in my career up to the time I was appointed as the Executive Officer of Government on my island. To our former Deputy Prime Minister, Teariki Heather, I thank you very much for your support and also for our friendship. Thank you for the tremendous assistance that you have provided to me which I believe has helped me to achieve the status of being a Member of this Honourable House today.

To Junior Areai and your wife, I thank you for your support. I also would like to acknowledge my brother and also my family from my Mangaia side. I want to thank you for looking after me during the time I resided on Rarotonga up to today.

To Dr Tamarua and your wife who have given me all the support that I needed in various ways, I thank you very much for what you have done for me.

I also want to thank Moe Taputoa and his wife. This person works at the Motor Centre and he has dreadlocks but don't think he is Bob Marley's brother. He was born and bred in Mitiaro and he is a strong supporter during my campaign. This gentleman was responsible for getting all my voters to the voting booth and his character is that he doesn't care very much about anything, he just goes wherever he wants to go.

I also would like to acknowledge our good friend the former Member of Parliament for Mitiaro, Papa Tangata Vavia, a long serving Member of this House. I would like to thank him very much for his contributions to the welfare of our island. I would like to confirm to this House that any of the projects that you have started but are not completed at this time, I will continue to work on it and complete it. Maybe while I am in this Honourable House I will need your help and advice one day. I would like to humbly request that when I need you, please give me your help and support when I come to you.

I also would like to convey special acknowledgement to the tribe of humility. Maybe during my term in Parliament you will start to see the way I work to benefit our island. Maybe you will then realise that there is no need for our island to be represented by another person in this House but myself.

Madam Speaker, I would now like to present my views on a number of issues presented in the Speech from the Throne.

Firstly, the Speech from the Throne touched on the wages for our workers. When I was appointed the Executive Officer for our island Mitiaro in 2016, the first thing I noticed was that people were reluctant to do their work. When I investigated deeper into the situation, I realised that the real reason was due to very low wages for our workers on Mitiaro. One thing I noticed was that the Head of Agriculture was getting paid exactly the same salary as his staff. This is also the same situation with the Head of the Energy Division, his salary was the same as those who works under his administration. When I think about this and put myself in this situation, where I am the Head of a Ministry and I receive exactly the same salary as my staff, I wouldn't be happy. My feeling would be why should I put every effort into my work.

I am saddened Madam Speaker because some of the public servants served for many long years and yet they retired on a very low retirement package. On my island, what has been happening is that public servants who have served the Government for many long years receive the same salary as someone who has just joined the workforce yesterday. Madam Speaker, my preference is that although the minimum wage is currently set at \$7.25 an hour, I want to propose a minimum rate of \$10.00 an hour but only for us in Mitiaro.

I would like to acknowledge the Financial Secretary because in the Budget for 2017, they were very generous to give us an additional allocation of \$60,000 to cover the wages for our workers. I wanted to increase the wages for those long serving public servants but I had disagreements with the Ministry of Finance.

I would also like to state that at this time, I will be supporting our Island Government and the Heads of our various Government agencies on the island in looking after those who are about to retire and also to create job opportunities for the younger ones returning to the island and wanting to work. When I was the Executive Officer of Government on the island, I initiated a system where job opportunities are created to allow our young people living on Rarotonga to return to our island of Mitiaro and work instead of remaining here in Rarotonga.

The second matter that I would like to touch on is our drinking water. We are one of the islands that rely on rain water for our drinking water. Our ground water is not suitable for drinking. It is only suitable for other purposes around the house such as washing the clothes and other home activities, but not for drinking. I would support any Government initiative to improve the concrete water tanks on the island of Mitiaro to resolve these issues.

The third matter that I would like to touch on is our public roads. As mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, efforts will be exerted towards the improvements of our roads on the Outer Islands. I would like to submit a proposal to Government to seal the roads on Mitiaro. In my estimation the only area that needs to be sealed is the residential areas of the town on Mitiaro which is about 4 kilometres in length.

When I observed our cleaning programme on our island, I noticed that all the dirt and dust caused by the cleaning activities are gathered on top of the roofs of households and when it rains, the dirt are carried by the rain water into the water tanks. I would like to stress on Government to priorities sealing the roads on Mitiaro before the sealing of roads on other Outer Islands begin because our road sealing will be quick. The other Outer Islands like Atiu and Mangaia can be done afterwards.

The last matter I would like to speak on is our harbour. Our harbour was designed to allow for cargo holding space and there was no consideration for our fishing activities. I would like to advise this House that I have observed the way our harbour was constructed and at the moment there are some challenges with regards to setting our canoes and fishing boats to sea because of the conditions when it gets rough during high seas. I regularly asses the Avatiu harbour and noticed the slip way at the Avatiu harbour. I am asking if we can have something similar to Avatiu harbour, maybe four parking spots for our boats and canoes in Mitiaro.

These are not the only things that I would like to be done for Mitiaro. I have considered other areas as well and the options that are available to us and I do believe that these four items are the ones that we are realistically able to achieve for our island of Mitiaro within this parliamentary term.

I think Madam Speaker this is sufficient contribution from me in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member from Nukuroa for your interesting comments that you have presented today. I would like to give the Floor to the Member from Matavera, the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa.

MR V. TUPA: Madam Speaker, Kia Orana to you on this beautiful day and congratulations to your reappointment to the Honourable position as Speaker of Parliament. To all the staff of Parliament and the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Kia Orana to you all.

With your indulgence Madam Speaker, please allow me to express my greetings to the people in my constituency, Matavera.

Firstly, I praise God for my election as the Member of Parliament for the village of Matavera.

Greetings to all the people residing in the village of Matavera. To all the various denominations in the village, the Revival Church, Catholic Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Cook Islands Christian Church, the Cornerstone Church as well as all the Pastors and Ministers of the Gospel within the village of Matavera, Kia Orana.

Kia Orana to all the traditional leaders within the village, Ui Ariki, Ui Mataiapo and Ui Rangatira. To all the former Members of Parliament of the village, those who have contested as Members of Parliament – Kia Orana to you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour. Special mention to Sir Frederick Goodwin and Mama Ina Goodwin who was the former Queen's Representative – greetings to you in the name of our Lord.

To all the elders within our village, and especially to my parents in law Papa Motu Kora and Mama Tu and all other elderly who are unwell – Papa Ina Samuel, commonly known as Upa and all the elders of the village – Kia Orana to you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour. I convey special greetings to my own mother, Mama Ngai Tupa who is also unwell in the village of Takuvaine – may God be with you.

To all the households and families who have gone through bereavements in recent days, I convey to you my sincere greetings. To the families of Mama Moekopu Vogel, Papa Aerenga, Papa Mataio Aperau – may God bless you all at this time of sorrow. To Papa William Vogel and Mama Tere Aperau, I extend to you both my greetings and words of encouragement for the days ahead. May our Heavenly Father help and guide you both.

Greetings also to all the growers in our village because I believe the agricultural sector is carrying our nation throughout these days and so to you all, God bless you.

I would like to make special mention to my very hardworking Campaign Committee who worked hard during the time for the General Election. To our Chairman, Papa Tanga Tairea, Campaign Manager, Reno, Tereora, Aneru, Secretary – Timoti, and the Treasurer – Lizzie and all the hardworking committee and to the people of the village of Matavera, as well as our English speaking friends within the village – Kia Orana to you all and thank you for giving me your support, may God bless you all.

Finally, I would like to extend special greetings and much appreciation to you my darling wife, Taupepa Tupa for your endless and hard work in getting me into

Parliament today. May God bless both of us and give us the strength to serve Him in the Church as well as the village of Matavera. To all of us, God bless you all.

Madam Speaker, I would now like to come back to the Speech from the Throne. I captured two main points from this message. Firstly, working together with the business sectors in our country, organisations outside of Government and as well as the people of our country.

Secondly, he mentioned that our financial status is healthy.

I will now come back to the subject of Agriculture that was mentioned in the speech from the Throne. A plan has been put in place to carefully look into doing things appropriately. It is my belief Madam Speaker that the most important thing is working together with our growers because they have all the knowledge and experiences in this area.

The second area that I would like to talk about is Tourism because we understand the strength in the tourism sector. However, I would like to mention other departments that are working together with Tourism to help enhance this sector. The first department is the Ministry of Agriculture because it provides the necessities to feed our tourists. Secondly, is the Ministry of Cultural Department because our culture is the main attraction for our tourists here. Thirdly are our people because our hospitality is well-known to visitors to our shores.

I would also like to talk about the Marae Moana because when I read the Marae Moana Act, there are related issues concerning the land as well as the villages. I believe we need to review this because we are all involved in the management of the Marae Moana.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to talk about our business sectors. I would like to bring an observation to all our Members of Parliament. I notice that our small businesses are having difficulties and suffering to survive.

Madam Speaker, I recall that at one time, our Prime Minister mentioned about Climate Change. I believe there is something put in place under the Green Climate Fund which I trust the Government is looking at opportunities that will help our country. My request is to us Honourable Members of Parliament, not only in Government but also in other organisations to look at the areas where we can relate to this Green Climate Fund. I believe our officials have conducted consultations throughout the villages for people to understand where they can link to this Green Climate Fund. However, my request to the Minister responsible to this portfolio is to help us with the process in accessing the funds because our people are having great difficulty tapping into the fund to help them.

I would also like to touch on the area of waste management. The message from the Throne mentioned that \$50 million has been set aside to store batteries. This allocation of funds Honourable Members is from the Green Climate Fund. That is why I am encouraging organisations out there but not only them, and also our people in the Outer Islands, to try and utilise this fund to help them.

I would like to touch on the issue of foreshore protection within our islands. We have experienced the many problems we had to address during hurricane seasons especially with our people in the Northern Group Islands as well as the Southern Group.

Madam Speaker, this is all I have to bring to us for now. I have other views but I would like to give the opportunity to other new Members of Parliament to speak.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member.

(Applause)

Thank you very much Honourable Member and I notice the Honourable Kitai on the Floor. Please bear with me Honourable Member. I will give you five minutes to talk and I will then interrupt you because we have a Motion to put to the House to defer the Reply from the Throne until after the Budget is passed.

Therefore if I interrupt you, please take your seat so we can finish our meeting at 2:00pm. You have the Floor.

MR M. KITAI: I think I shall leave my speech for Monday.

MADAM SPEAKER: That's fine. You can greet them now.

MR M. KITAI: Madam Speaker, my book is full of greetings so with your indulgence if I could please leave my speech for Monday.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: If nobody speaks we will finish early before 2:00 p.m because 2:00 p.m. is our adjournment time.

MR T. TURA: Madam Speaker, I rise to move a Motion:

To adjourn the debate for the Address in Reply and for it to be continued at a future Sitting following the Budget debate

Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I see the Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion and may I just have a brief announcement to make to the Honourable Members please. It's a courtesy advance notice to the Honourable Members that when we come back next Monday please be prepared to have a double Sitting on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. That's the courtesy notice Madam Speaker, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Prime Minister.

Seconded by the Honourable Prime Minister

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed?

This question is on the Motion to adjourn the debate on the Address in Reply and to be continued at a future sitting following the Budget debate.

Motion agreed to

MADAM SPEAKER: Parliament is now adjourned until Monday, 24 September at 1.00 p.m.

CLOSING PRAYER

Sitting adjourned at 1.51 p.m.