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MADAM SPEAKER TOOK THE CHAIR AT 12.54 p.m.

OPENING PRAYER

MADAM SPEAKER (N. RATTLE): Honourable Member please be seated.

Honourable Members we have a Message to Parliament, a Royal Recommendation from the Queen's Representative.

Message No. 1

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 Parliament to proceed upon the Bill this Short Title where is the Appropriation Amendment Act 2020.

DATED at RAROTONGA this 24th day of March 2020.

I now lay this on the Table.

Kia Orana and greetings to each and every individual Member of Parliament this afternoon. On behalf of the Acting Clerk and each member of the staff here at Parliament House, I welcome you all to our first meeting of 2020.

Your Excellency Sir Tom Marsters and Lady Marsters and your staff, a very warm welcome and Kia Orana to you all today. Our Traditional Leaders and Religious Advisory Council across the nation, I extend to you all a very warm Kia Orana, and equally so to all our people listening in or watching on the livestream.

Wednesday 25th March 2020 at 1.00 p.m. at the Parliament Sitting will go down in history as an extraordinary event due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic that no Member of Parliament would have imagined to take place. As you can see, we have tried to observe the 1.5 to two metres social distance spacing, a glass barrier to contain the droplets, information on hand washing and the use of sanitisers which you are provided on each of your desk. You have a little bottle and individual tissue papers with a disposal bag on your tables.

At our lunch break today, we will still be practicing those remedies by using paper disposable dishes for our meal as well as you can see there are mask available to you. At this point, I would like to thank the Ministry of Health for providing us with the sanitisers and to Rangi Peyroux for providing us the masks free in promoting the attempts against the virus spreading in our country.

Let us focus as we deliver our services today for our people through peace and harmony in solidarity to prevent and to respond effectively and the recovery of our nation.

In addition to our remedies of keeping the spread of the virus should any of us be carrying it, we have decided that instead of standing when you are addressing the Speaker which is in our Standing Orders, that you do that, I ask that you remain seated so that the piece of glass in front of you will retain your droplets on your individual tables.

Kia Orana and God Bless us all today.

Is there a Ministerial Statement for now? There is no Ministerial Statement, so it is now Question Time and I see the Leader of the House.

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

- That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as is necessary;**
- (1) **to enable a number of Bills to be introduced and passed through all their stages; these will include the Appropriation Amendment Bill 2020, COVID-19 Bill 2020, Immigration Bill 2020, Transport Amendment Bill 2020, Police (Validation of Reappointment) Bill 2020, The Income Tax Amendment Bill 2020,**
- (2) **to enable the Immigration Bill 2020 to be introduced, have the Second Reading brought Pro Forma, and then have a Motion moved to refer it to a Select Committee**

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Is there a Seconder to the Motion?

Secinded by the Honourable, Selina Napa

I will put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

We will now go to the presentations of Bills.

PRESENTATION OF BILLS

The Bills will be presented as per Motion just passed. I call the Minister Responsible for the Appropriation Amendment Bill.

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE (J. DANIEL): Short Title: Appropriation Amendment Act 2020.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Can I ask the Minister to please name the date and time for the Second Reading of the Bill.

HON. M. BROWN: Madam Speaker, forthwith.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Second Reading of the Appropriation Amendment Bill 2020 is forthwith.

The Second Bill for presentation is the COVID-19 Bill 2020, and I call the Minister Responsible.

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Short Title: COVID-19 Act 2020.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Can I ask the Minister to please name the date and time for the Second Reading of the Bill.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Madam Speaker, after the Appropriation Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Second Reading of the COVID-19 Bill 2020 is called for a Second Reading after the Appropriation Amendment Bill 2020.

We will now go to the Immigration Bill 2020.

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Short Title: Immigration Act 2020.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Can I ask the Minister for the date and time for the Second Reading of the Bill.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker, following the conclusion of the debate on the COVID-19 Bill 2020.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Second Reading of the Immigration Bill 2020 is to take place after the COVID-19 Bill 2020.

Now we will go to the Transport Amendment Bill 2020. I call on the Minister Responsible.

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Short Title: Transport Amendment Act 2020.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Can I ask the Minister for a date and time for the Second Reading of the Bill.

HON. R. TAPAITAU: Madam Speaker, following the COVID-19 Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Second Reading for the Transport Amendment Bill 2020 is called after the Immigration Act 2020. Thank you.

We will go to the Police (Validation of Reappointment) Act 2020.

May I call on the Minister Responsible.

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Short Title: Transport Amendment Act 2020 – forgive me. Police (Validation of Reappointment) Act 2020.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Can I ask the Minister the date and time for the Second Reading of the Bill?

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker, following the Transport Amendment Bill please, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Police Validation Reappointment Act 2020 is called for the Second Reading after the Transport Amendment Act 2020.

We will now go to the Income Tax Amendment Bill 2020. I call the Minister Responsible.

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Short Title: Income Tax Amendment Act 2020.

BILL READ A FIRST TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: May I have the date and the time for the Second Reading of the Bill.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker, following the conclusion of the debate on the COVID-19 Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Income Tax Amendment Bill 2020 is called for the Second Reading after the Police (Validation of Reappointment) Act 2020.

That completes the presentations of the Bills. We will now go to the presentation of Papers. We have Papers 37, 39, 44 and 45 to be presented by the Minister Rose Brown.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Madam Speaker, I have the honour to submit:

Paper No. 37 – Public Health (Notifiable Conditions) Order 2020,
Serial No. 2020/01

I lay this on the Table.

Madam Speaker, I have the honour to submit:

Paper No. 39 – Public Health Dangerous Conditions Order 2020,
Serial No. 2020/02

I lay this on the Table.

Madam Speaker, I have the honour to submit:

Paper No. 44 – the Ministry of Health COVID-19 Supervised Quarantine
on arrival in Rarotonga Regulations 2020, Serial No. 2020/07

I present this to the House.

Madam Speaker, I have the honour to submit:

Paper No. 45 – Ministry of Health (COVID-19: Domestic Travel Restrictions)
Regulations 2020, Serial No. 2020/08

I present this to the House.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I ask the Prime Minister to present Paper No. 40.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker. I have the honour to submit:

Paper No. 40 – Commissioner of Police (Reappointment)
Order 2020, Serial No. 2020/03

I now lay this on the Table.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I call the Minister George Angene to present Paper 41.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Madam Speaker. I am happy to present:

Paper No. 41 – Development Investment Amendment Regulations 2019,
Serial No. 2020/4

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I call the Minister Mark Brown to present Paper 42 and 43.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker. I am happy to present:

Paper No. 42 – Insurance Amendment Regulations Order 2019,
Serial No. 2020/05

I lay this on the Table.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Members, we will now go to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Orders of the Day as agreed earlier, is the Appropriation Amendment Bill. I call the Minister for the Motion on the Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Members of Parliament, special acknowledgement to our people listening in from the Pa Enuu.

Madam Speaker, I move:

That Appropriation Amendment Bill 2019/20 be read a Second time

Today, I present to you the 2019/20 Supplementary Budget.

When we initiated the process for this Supplementary Budget a little more than a month ago, it was with the simple intent of advancing funding for some critical project work and topping up the funding of several Ministries. How things have changed in just a few short weeks.

COVID-19 is having an unprecedented impact on not only the Cook Islands, but on the whole world. The spread of COVID-19 is causing more economic problems than the Global Financial Crisis did is disrupting travel more than the SARS crisis.

For the Cook Islands, we are balancing very important priorities, the health of our people and the health of our economy and businesses. But our businesses are made up of our people, and our people will always be our first priority.

We are restricting our borders using quarantine measures, and we support our friends in New Zealand in closing their borders as well. It is the right thing to do to protect our people, even knowing the economic disruption that follows, including the severe impact on our tourism business.

But it is also important that we do not close our borders completely. We may not have tourists coming in but we do have Cook Islanders coming home. We have vital medical supplies coming in, fresh foods, essential supplies and we need to be able to evacuate our people should the need arise, and when the virus passes we need to be ready to get back to business as quick as possible.

We do not know how long the disruption will last, or when the world may start recovering, and even how long that recovery may take. We know that it will not be an instant. It will take time for our livelihoods to recover.

Today, this Supplementary Budget has become one of the more important pieces of legislation to be passed in recent years. It is a keystone of the Economic Response Plan that I presented last week and it provides the funding to make it happen. It is the

Economic Response Plan which will keep our people afloat and that will set the foundation for us to recover. With the passing of this Supplementary Budget that critical funding becomes available and we will start using those funds quickly.

The most important elements of this budget, through to the end of June are firstly:

- \$28 million of funding for the Economic Response Plan;
- \$5 million of flexible funding specifically for the Health response to COVID-19, and a further \$1.9 million for small capital projects as part of the Response Plan.

The \$28 million for the Economic Response Plan will be managed by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, and these funds will be directed to where they are needed. MFEM is working with key stakeholders to develop the operational processes to ensure that when the plan is rolled out next week, it operates as efficiently as possible in as a short time frame as possible.

This economic support will take multiple forms Madam Speaker. Firstly, wage support through businesses so employees will manage to get at least the minimum wage through to the next three months and unemployment support for those who have lost their jobs.

Additional wage support for those who undertake formal training, there will be income support for our vulnerable community members, there will be cash grants for our businesses, and there will be a range of tax relief measures.

I have mentioned in the Economic Response Plan, the loan repayment holiday. I expected our Banks to comply with this Government initiative on a blanket basis. I am now hearing that only those who are struggling will qualify. Let me make this perfectly clear. If these Banks are wanting their clients to spend their resources first before they themselves will share in the pay, then that is unacceptable. The time for protecting our balance sheet is over. If you do not come to the party, then I will look to make you comply, including changing the law.

I encourage everyone to read the Economic Response Plan that is available on the MFEM website to understand the support options available to you in more detail.

The \$5 million for the Health response has been placed into a separate fund also to be managed by MFEM called the COVID-19 Response Fund. These funds can be applied for by any government agency as long as they are for the health response to COVID-19. This means that if an agency needs to spend more funds than they have to manage work that will directly benefit our health response to the spread of the virus, we can support them with that work.

We have placed this with MFEM as we have project managers and procurement specialists in this Ministry who will facilitate the use of the funds efficiently. They will get the funds where they are needed, or get the procurement done quickly, depending on the need.

Lastly, the \$1.9 million in small capital projects. These funds support a range of capital projects that will engage local contractors to initiate works that can be commenced quickly and employ Cook Islanders to do it. I will tell you about these in a minute. Some of you will have noticed that this does not add up to the \$61 million of the

response package I announced last week. The remaining funds will be appropriated in the main budget in June.

I would highlight that not all of the package requires appropriation. Some of the total package are funds that our State-Owned Enterprises will provide or the tax relief we are providing. An example is Te Aponga Uira, which is providing support through electricity charge reductions for people and businesses.

Madam Speaker, it is worth discussing for a moment why the Government is spending so much money on the Economic Response Plan. For many people the instinctive response is 'austerity', keeping your money and spending only as much as you must, and hoping for a recovery.

But let me tell you Madam Speaker that austerity has a big disadvantage during a crisis such as we are dealing with now. Austerity in this circumstance leads to even more slowing of an economy, and that can result in even more loss of jobs and livelihoods under threat. Let me assure you that this is not a time for austerity.

The Global Financial Crisis, just over a decade ago, showed us that those countries that responded with rapid investment in their people and infrastructure, ultimately came out of the crisis in a stronger position than those who opted for austerity.

We have learned the lesson of that crisis and are taking the same approach. Through our hard work as a people and as a country, we were able to save \$56.7 million of our funds in our budget and transferred them into our Stabilisation Account. We remember the lesson in the Scripture about seven years of feast and seven years of famine. It is these funds that we put aside for a rainy day that we will now use to help our small country get through this crisis.

Our small nation is but a speck in the global economy. But our decisions today, of which this Supplementary Budget is one of many, will help to determine what kind of speck we are. Are we to be a speck of dust to be brushed aside, or will we be a speck of gold?

We need to be smart with our money, we need to spend it wisely. That means putting the money where the greatest benefit results and that is to our people. Through this Supplementary Budget we have started that process, we have looked at funds that might not be spent, and we have re-directed them where they are needed.

We will also do this through the next budget in June. We will look at where funds can be spent more effectively. We will redirect funds to make sure that we get the maximum benefit.

We have not forgotten other areas Madam Speaker, some of the areas where we have directed funds through this Supplementary Budget and I will mention those to you now.

There is \$220,000 for the Ministry of Corrective Services personnel. Corrective Services staff received long-needed pay increases in the 2019/20 budget, but it has stretched their budget so we are giving them the extra support that they need.

There is \$280,000 for the Police Service for personnel, completing their pay increase this year. Similar to Corrections, the Police also received a long-needed pay increase in the current budget, and likewise we are topping up their budget to pay for it.

There is \$268,000 for the Seabed Minerals Authority for start-up costs as the Authority moves into the next phase of operations. It is worth exploring this point a little further. This fledgling industry will become increasingly important to our country's economy in the future, allowing us to diversify away from tourism and providing an alternative source of income to our country. It will provide vital extra funding for the Cook Islands today and into the future.

There is \$115,000 for Parliamentary Sitting Expenses for March and June of this year. Parliament will sit four times this year, passing important legislation for the improvement of our country. To support the extra sittings, Parliamentary services need this top-up to cover translation, and drafting the Parliamentary records and so on.

There is an additional \$200,000 for Inter Island Shipping to charter extra voyages to the Pa Enea. We all know that shipping is a vital service for our islands. The Government is developing a Shipping Roadmap which will guide our decisions on shipping into the future, but this will take time. In the meantime, the Government has, and will, place extra funds into ensuring ships can deliver our people, our goods, and also important equipment to the Pa Enea.

A further \$240,000 has been allocated to the Social Responsibility Fund to expand this programme and to enable our Members of Parliament to support further community works to be completed in preparation for the response by all our Puna to COVID-19 threat.

\$200,000 Madam Speaker has been allocated to complete upgrades to the FM radio and TV equipment in the Pa Enea to enhance the distribution of information via these broadcasting channels. We understand how vital these radio services are for the Pa Enea, and we are working to improve them.

There is \$5.7 million brought forward for Te Mato Vai to cover various works for this critical piece of infrastructure, to upgrade the works on 10 water stations to counter possible delays experienced because of COVID-19. We need to get clean disinfected drinking water to all of our homes as quick as possible. We do not need any more legal delays.

Madam Speaker, the one strength of our small nation is our community, our willingness to help our friends and family through both the good times as well as the tough times. We are entering one of those tough times and I ask all Cook Islanders to keep doing, what we have always done. Look out for each other and support each other.

One way that we can do that is by keeping on purchasing locally and as much as possible going on with life as we have always have within the limits of social distancing of course, and following any new guidance from the Ministry of Health. By buying goods and services, we are providing cash for businesses who employs staff and who buys produce and supplies from each other and those others employ and buys goods

from other people and so on. When we spend we keep money moving, we keep staff employed, and we help families provide for each other.

I would also like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the New Zealand Government. On Monday, the New Zealand High Commissioner contacted me with an offer of an additional \$7million of funding that we can use in our response to COVID-19. These funds give the Cook Islands Government a little more space in which to manage our response or to manage our response for longer should we need to.

There are some dark economic clouds on the horizon just now. But like our ancestors of old, journeying on their vaka, we will find a path through to the sunlight on the other side. COVID-19 will pass, and we will get through it, and we will recover. This Supplementary Budget is just one of those first steps.

As I said at our national Sunday service, let us all do the possible and God will do the impossible. I applaud and congratulate our businesses that are chipping in and doing their share, like CITC, Prime Foods and all our shop retailers. Our car rental companies that are offering vehicles, free of charge for our Puna volunteers. Our accommodator's who are offering their hotels for quarantine purposes. Our construction and contracting companies who are offering their services for urgent works and all the way down to individuals who are offering money and their time. This is the spirit we want; this is the true Cook Islands spirit.

As Bishop Pere said in his Sunday sermon in *2 Timothy 1:7* "*God did not give us a spirit of fear; but a spirit of power, of love and a rational mind*". Let us use that spirit to protect and preserve us all.

Kia Toa e Kia Manuia.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister, Mark Brown for that wonderful speech.

I would like to call for a Secunder for the Motion that was moved for the Second Reading of the Bill, please.

Secinded by the Honourable Prime Minister, Henry Puna

The Floor is now open for debate, if any Member would like to speak. Does the Prime Minister want to respond as the Secunder?

Is there anybody that would like to take the Floor? The Honourable Selina Napa would like to take the Floor.

MRS S. NAPA: Kia Orana to all of us in the Name of our Lord. Kia Orana to the Prime Minister and your Cabinet Ministers. Greetings to you Madam Speaker and all your staff.

Firstly, I would like to present my thoughts before I give my support to the Bill. I also thank the Ministry of Finance for being present for the debate of the Bill. Their presence here will assist us to understand the Bill better and it will enlighten us on the

facts of the Appropriation Bill and especially the allocation for COVID-19 that we are facing today.

After I returned home, there were a few people that were unhappy with what was presented in the Bill and they have requested that I come back and ask the Deputy Prime Minister for some clarification.

Firstly, I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister to please explain the repayment of loans including the interests. Can you please clarify whether the repayment is just for the principal amount and what about the interest owed? The request here is if both the principal and interest can be suspended for the next three to six months pending on the duration of COVID-19.

The second one is the paid subsidy for some of the private business. I am not sure who the responsible person is for this area, but employees have not been clarified about their entitlement when they are laid off from work. It was explained yesterday that Government will pay the minimum wage and the private employers will top up the wages for their workers.

In the last couple of days, we encountered, especially the people living inland in Titikaveka with our water pressure. They do not have any water and they requested for our fire trucks to deliver water to their homes. I will say that there is an increase with people requiring water to be delivered to their homes.

I have looked at this package and there has not been any allocation for water distribution and yet the Ministry of Health is promoting hygiene and the importance of cleaning our hands with water. Maybe I have not seen it but people are asking for help to deliver water to their homes.

I also look at the allocation for the Ministry of Health because we know today, the Ministry of Health is asking for assistance from the individual Puna to protect our people from this virus. In some villages, their Emergency Operation Centers (EOC) are established but some require help with setting up their individual offices in their villages. Therefore, I am asking whether any help can be allocated to the different little Puna in the village from the Ministry of Health.

In our Takitumu district, it is quite evident the support of our own people in the villages who came together to set up their own EOC. They took the initiative to set up their own Puna in readiness for this COVID-19.

Those are my questions and I will wait for your response in the hope that there will be some assistance.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Government for putting together this package to help our nation. I remember the recession in the nineties that forced our people to migrate overseas. However, what was beneficial at the time was the fact that Government had a package in place to assist those who were affected by the recession. The issue encountered however was educating and training these people so that they are able to utilise the funds appropriately that are available to support them.

In those days, the Ministry of Transition was formed, but what happened was that people were involved in the same business such as egg farming, planting and so forth and the result of that was that today, it failed and was not successful.

However, I am happy with the package that is available to our people today because it has been cautiously prepared and maybe because of the experience that we encountered with the recession in the nineties. Therefore, I strongly support this package today and hoping that it will be accessible as soon as possible to help our people who are already laid off from work.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Firstly, greetings to all of us in the Name of our Lord this late afternoon.

I thank the Minister of Finance for giving us this Supplementary Budget to assist our people during these times. This has become a big help for our people in the North and the Southern Group islands including us here in Rarotonga. I strongly support this Supplementary Budget but I have some thoughts that I would like to share with us all.

I fully support the allocation for the Northern Group islands including the Southern Group islands of \$2 million. It will be a big help for all our people in these islands. Therefore, to all the people of the North and Southern group, we the Members of Parliament fully support this allocation for you all.

As explained by the Minister of Finance, in this \$61 million appropriation, I believe the left over will be appropriated for the month of June. I believe all the Members of Parliament for Rarotonga will fit into this category to assist ourselves.

To the people of the Northern and the Southern group islands, your allocation is in this Supplementary Budget. In the House today is the Member of Parliament for Rakahanga and the former Member of Parliament for Rakahanga. I believe there is an allocation for a boat to be purchased for the island of Rakahanga. I believe this allocation is for a boat because when a ship arrives to their island during rough seas, it is hard for the barge to get to the ship. So I fully support the allocation for the Outer Islands.

Madam Speaker, I believe there is an allocation of funds available to us Members of Parliament under the SRF. The Minister allocated each Member of Parliament \$10,000. It would have been fantastic if the allocation was for \$20,000 instead. This is the reason for my strong support to this Supplementary Budget.

The Minister of Finance also allocated some funds in the Civil List for us Members of Parliament for domestic and international travel. What I would like to ask the Minister of Finance is to consider us Members of Parliament who are not privilege under the Civil List when it comes to travelling abroad. We all understand our entitlement under the Civil List.

I would like to request for all the travel by the Members of Parliament to be upgraded from economy to premium class. I noticed the allocation given to us in the Civil List is quite substantive which will assist us when we travel abroad to represent our country.

Lastly, I would like to make a request to the Minister of Finance about the allocation for the Ministry of Health in terms of the wage subsidy. I believe we have all read the comments made by Danny Mataroa in the newspaper today. If you have not read it, please read it before you go home because I believe these comments are very important for us to consider.

Danny raised an important point especially for us growers here on Rarotonga. He said they do not register the payment of wages for their workers. I believe this includes us Members of Parliament who pay our workers under the table. Some of these employees only work for two or three days a week and the money the growers get from the produce they sell is what they pay their workers.

I understand the presentation made by the Minister of Finance but I would like to ask the Minister of Finance to look at this allocation again especially for us growers like myself and Sonny Williams and other Members of Parliament who cannot afford to pay their registration fees or their Super.

Therefore, Minister of Finance I ask you to please give us a bit more in this allocation to assist us.

Therefore, I strongly support the Supplementary Budget before us today.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much. As our time is getting very close to suspension, Parliament will now suspend until 3.00 p.m.

Parliament suspended at 2.55 p.m.

Parliament resumed at 3.00 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members please be seated.

Parliament is resumed.

When we went on the break, an Honourable Member was wanting to take the Floor, the Honourable Albert Nicholas. Honourable Member you may take the Floor.

MR A. NICHOLAS: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of this very refreshed, revegetate and brand new Honourable House, and people of the Cook Islands, Kia Orana to all of us.

Madam Speaker, if I may just briefly with an overview touch on the Minister of Finance's speech earlier. May I speak to just a small portion of his speech and not his whole speech.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members and the people of the Cook Islands, unique moments in history. It calls for unique, cool, calm, collective, sensible, courage and humble measures. May I take this moment Madam Speaker to applaud the Deputy Prime Minister, who also happens to be the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Mark Brown, also the Prime Minister and the Members of Cabinet for having the courage to implement the necessary conditions in order to protect our very volatile borders and its people within its borders from a very serious problem that threatens our existence.

I also applaud the Cabinet and especially the Deputy Prime Minister for the support programmes that his team has initiated. A number of support plans that will cushion the day to day burdens of daily life within our borders. Such necessary decisions Madam Speaker required to ease the possible pain in case we face this global threat face on.

I also applaud the Members of the Opposition, your Leader, my dear Aunty Tina Pupuke Browne for coming to the fore in support of these initiatives and programmes which is led by the Government of the day.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of the House, the threat that is before us knows no boundaries Speaker and it does not define from Members of Government or Members of the Opposition; it does not care whether you are young or old, whether you are weak or strong, not good looking or good looking. In essence what I am saying Madam Speaker it knows no boundaries and it differs from no one.

It gives me great honour and pleasure to sit here and witness both sides of the House coming together in order to work in conjunction with each other for the safe keeping and the betterment of our people.

I applaud the Minister of Finance and his team once again for putting in place support programmes both in resources and monetary to ease all our burdens as we walk hand in hand in facing the global threat that is before us.

Once again Madam Speaker I applaud both sides of the House this afternoon, thank you.

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

MRS A. ARMSTRONG: Thank you Madam Speaker.

Honourable Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and all Honourable Members in the House and all those working in our Parliament, Kia Orana.

I would like to support this Bill before us, but I would like to speak on a few issues that I would like some clarification or would like to voice.

More importantly, the issue that I have is the increase in the travel allowance for Members of Parliament, which is increased by \$200,000, which is about 59 percent increase from what was budgeted and what is in the supplementary. I would like to know why, when we are supposedly tightening our belts at this time. We have this

crisis on our hands and whatever money that we can save and give back to our people, we should look at that very strongly.

The other issue I have is the Pa Enea. I understand we are all getting the Vodafone discounts but as the Te Aponga Uira is not in charge of the electricity in the Pa Enea. I was just wondering whether we would also get the subsidy in the Pa Enea. As we face this crisis together, I hope that the Pa Enea will also benefit from any discounts and subsidies that are passed or available.

But overall, I would like to thank the Government, the private sector, the Chamber of Commerce and everyone who has come together to work towards this Response Plan, for economic plans that we have made available to our people.

I would also like to commend Doctor Aumea Herman for foreseeing the effects that this disease or this COVID-19 crisis would bring to our islands and a speedy action in advising Government to take the necessary actions when she did.

I am thankful that the Government has moved fast to close the borders of the Pa Enea and hopefully this virus will not spread there.

That is all I have to say but I would like to support this Supplementary Budget apart from the MP travel allowances that I have raised. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Tina Pupuke Browne, you have the Floor.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Madam Speaker, Colleagues of this Honourable House and to our people listening to our broadcast and watching our livestream, Kia Orana in the Name of the Lord.

Before I put forward my comments on the Amendment Bill before the House, I should first seek the leave for three of my Members from Parliament. The Honourable Tetangi Matapo in Mangaia, the Honourable Wesley Kareroa in Mangaia, they are not absent because they are sick, they are absent because the border is close. The Honourable Nooroa Baker is in New Zealand and he is away on medical grounds. I intended to get a leave of absence for the Honourable William Heather but we saw him earlier today. I think he is in the House somewhere outside.

The second matter that I want to raise, I think the Member of Parliament for Pukapuka/Nassau suspended some Standing Orders but I did not hear him suspend Standing Order 155. If I am mistaken on that, my apologies but if I am not mistaken, then I think that Motion needs to be moved. The reason why we are sitting down is because we would have suspended that Standing Order and I did not hear the Motion to suspend that Standing Order. But I will leave it to him to rectify the position Madam Speaker.

Yesterday, we had the opportunity to hear the presentation from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management. They presented to us in my view, quite a detailed presentation on the Economic Response Plan and the Supplementary Budget funding measures. This was a first for us and it was because this is the first we have encountered

an emergency such as this. My understanding and the understanding of the Members of the Opposition was that, we wanted to ensure that we understood the Appropriation Amendment Bill before we come today, so that we can minimise the questions that are asked. I am pleased to say that there were a number of questions that was asked of the two officials from MFEM.

I want to comment first on the \$28 million for the Economic Response Plan. I applaud Government for coming to the party to assist our people. At the beginning, there were some concerns whether all employees would be treated alike, or whether it would be public servants verses private sectors employees. I am so pleased and proud of the fact that we have treated all the employees in the same way.

Despite the fact that the spirit behind the stimulus package was to ensure that we retain as many employees as possible in the workforce, we have seen recently in the last two or three days, that it has not been possible for some of the major employers, especially employers in the Tourism accommodation business. I am hoping that the wage subsidy that is being offered by Government will keep the majority of the workers in the workforce.

Evidently, the reason why we want to maintain them is that once we come out of this emergency, we should be able to kick-start and run or do it all in the same time.

We also discussed the other grants that Government had agreed for the small medium business and the large business. There is no doubt in my mind that there will not be a rush to that queue. I think if anything, people will be queuing up for the wage subsidy.

Government's allocating funds also for upskilling the work force, I think is an excellent initiative not only to upskill our work force but also to keep them occupied during a time that there is not much work.

The reduction on the contribution to the Superannuation is welcomed by the private sector and the tax relief that is being offered is also going to be welcomed by everybody especially the private sector.

The challenge for us now is to move forward and assist with the operation side and make all of this happen. I am aware that the Ministry of Internal Affairs have been charged with assisting with the wage subsidy and the unemployment. I am also aware that the private sector is collecting information of businesses, both members of the Chamber of Commerce and non- members to assist the process of ensuring that the pay out to their employers of the subsidy happens quickly.

It was confirmed to us, and I heard Minister Mark Brown in his Budget speech also confirmed, that the intention is to roll it out by at least the 30th of this month. We need however to be realistic. I do not think that everybody is expecting that everyone or every business is going to be paid on the 30th but I think the expectation is that payment starts on the 30th.

I was not sure whether it is 1.9 or 1.5 of the small capital projects – this is one area that I personally had asked the officials yesterday whether that part of the Budget can be increased, and the reason for that is because we need to be driving projects to keep

people at work. So the more projects that are driven, whether it be by Government or the private sector, if there are enough projects, then we will be helping our people or put money in their pockets so they can put food on their table.

So my request is, if there is money, for example if we do not need \$200,000 for the MP's travel, we could possibly apply that into this area so we can at least assist with keeping our employees in the work force.

I also wanted to say something about the \$280,000 personnel for the Police. I hear that this is to complete the increase salary for the Police. I am concerned that if or when the virus invades our country, the two major departments that is going to be stressed to the limit is the Ministry of Health and the Police, and I wonder whether we have provided sufficient funds in there to either increase the capacity of the Police so that they can cope with the situation.

I now want to talk very briefly about the banks, and the reason why I want to talk about the banks is, I heard the Deputy Prime Minister say some rather harsh words about the banks. My suggestion is to have a meeting with the Bankers Association and the reason why I am suggesting this is, I happen to be at a meeting where the Banks contribution or assistance was explained. I do not wish to explain it second hand, I might get it wrong but I am not sure that legislating or making changes to force the bank to provide mortgage holiday or holiday periods is the answer.

In the next Bill that we are going to be debating, we will be talking about very extensive sweeping powers that we are going to vest in Government officials. Normally, that is a frightening thing to do. So my request to the Deputy Prime Minister is to best have a discussion with the Banker's Association. Please let us not allow the emergency situation that we are in for us to make rash decisions.

Finally, I want to thank the Parliamentary Services for providing this very nice comfortable venue for us for our first Parliamentary Sitting this year.

Thank you and Kia Manuia.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I see the Honourable Terepai Maoate, you have the Floor.

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Madam Speaker. I will not be too long.

I would like to impress on all the matters we are discussing this afternoon, Madam Speaker. I would like to give my support to the issues that has been raised by our Leader, the Honourable Tina Browne, and as well as those that has spoken and the Government for providing this package for the people at this time. I would like to give my support and encouragement to all our people out there.

I would like to raise some points regarding our people in the Outer Islands. The situation of our internet and telephones are not good. This package that is going out on the 30th, I understand that all the people in the Outer Islands are wanting this to happen immediately so that they can reap the benefit. I would also like to ask for the people in the Outer Islands to reap this benefit. In Aitutaki, the working hours of some employees

have been reduced and although they have been emotionally affected, they are happy that this package that has been organised by Government are available.

One of the issues that I want to talk about is the misunderstanding by some people about the closing of our borders. People are misinterpreting the comments made by the Opposition. I want to assure our Government that the understanding by some people was to stop our people returning to our country. It was clearly explained by Crown Law that we are not stopping our people coming back to our country but we are delaying their arrival to stop this virus from getting into our country. The planes will continue to bring cargo and medical supplies for us and also take medical referrals to New Zealand.

When I spoke to the Chief Immigration Officer, I was happy when she told me that in the newspaper today, no passengers are allowed to enter our country and also for the next 14 days. I am happy to hear this but we will continue to pray for this virus not to reach us. My plea to our people out there is to listen to the advice from our leaders and if you have been overseas please quarantine yourself and follow the rules. We are all supporting this Bill before the House.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much. If there are no further speakers, I will call on the Minister Responsible to conclude the debate. You have the Floor Minister Brown.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker.

The Budget Statement is available and will be on line for all Members of Parliament to access. Those Members who asked questions, the answers are in the Budget Speech that I mentioned before. You can take the time and read through and find those answers yourself.

In terms of the roll out of the support package that is being implemented by Internal Affairs, we ask for the public's patience because this is a massive undertaking that is being done by Internal Affairs. Today, they are advertising for 50 staff to assist with the inputting of data entry of every individual that wishes to take advantage of the support package.

The wage subsidy alone for the private sector may entail payments up to five thousand workers. At the minimum wage rate, this amounts close to \$12 million, Madam Speaker. That will take time to put through the Government payroll system which is why Internal Affairs are working very, very hard around the clock to ensure that by Monday 30th, employees will start to have their information put through the system so that they can collect their benefit as quickly as possible.

Those employees at risk and need support can help themselves by providing their RMD numbers, their bank account numbers, their employer details when they contact Internal Affairs either through email, phone, through text or in person.

The operating headquarters for the Internal Affairs staff will be at the Sinai Hall to enable the distancing required for a large number of people dealing with this request. We will work together, all of those who are requesting support along with our agencies, we will be able to facilitate your request as quickly as possible so patience is what is requested of us all.

In terms of the loan repayment holiday for a three months period, this is something that the Government will insist with our banks. The tax payers of this country are putting in place a \$32 million support package for this Supplementary Budget, we expect those who have made money during the last seven to ten years to also contribute to our survival.

Make no mistake, over the last eight years of economic growth globally, the finance sector and the banks in particular have generated billions of dollars in profit. So when I hear that the support will only go to those who really need it and who are struggling, and that those who are doing well should continue with their loan repayments that to me is unacceptable. It is unacceptable to expect those who are strong to first make themselves weak and to spend all their resources before they get support from the bank. It is unacceptable that the banks will seek to protect their balance sheets at the expense of ordinary home loan owners who are trying to repay their debt.

To answer the Leader of the Opposition, I have met with the Bank Association and I made the Government position very clear. It seems now I need to make it even clearer. One way or the other Madam Speaker, our people will get the support they need to get us through this period without the burden being imposed on them of trying to repay debt while we are going through a period of national survival.

Just as businesses are being asked to close down, and just as people are being quarantined and countries are being quarantined, so to should debt be quarantined. This measure Madam Speaker is just the start of our recovery. It gives us breathing space for three months. We see this virus spreading through America and totally shutting down the biggest economy in the world. We do not know what the situation would be like in two weeks' time. Now is not the time not to grieve over who gets support and who does not.

Be assured that the Government is already planning for the next three months that will take us through to September and looking at the following three months to take us to the end of this year. These next three months Madam Speaker, as I said, gives us breathing space but they also give us time to assess what is happening around the world and what are the changes and what additional support we will need to provide for our people. And make no mistake Madam Speaker and to our people listening, this will not be over in three months, it will not be over in six months.

We are all in this together and just because we try and save one sector of the economy does not mean anything. All our efforts are to save everybody, and therefore, I commend this Bill to the House and thank those Members for their support of this Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I will now put the Question and the Question is:

That the Appropriation Amendment Bill be now read a Second time?

Motion agreed to

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to Amend the Appropriation Act 2019.

BILL READ A SECOND TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I now resolve Parliament into the Committee of Supply.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We will now go through the Schedules first and defer the Clauses till after.

We will begin with Schedule 1.

Schedule 1: Agency Budget Appropriations

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$166,578,875.00 stands part of Schedule 1?

Motion agreed to

Schedule 2: Payments on behalf of the Crown POBOC.

The Question is:

That the sum of \$28,159,338.00 stands part of Schedule?

Motion agreed to

Schedule 3: The Cook Islands Capital Spending.

I put the Question:

That \$50,153,924.00 stands part of the Schedule?

Motion agreed to

Schedule 4: Official Development Assistance.

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$57,489,437.00 stands part of the Schedule?

Motion agreed to

Schedule 5A: Other Expenses and Financing Transactions.

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$24,958,080.00 stands part of the Schedule?

Motion agreed to

Schedule 5B: Loan Repayment Fund (LRF) Appropriation.

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$9,925,000.00 stands part of the Schedule?

Motion agreed to

We will now go to the Summary of Schedule 1, 2, 3, 4, 5A and 5B.

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$337,264,654 stands as the total appropriation of the Summary?

Motion agreed to

We will now go back to the Clauses. I put the Question:

That Clause 1, Clause 2, Clause 3, Clause 4 and Clause 5 stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

We will now go to the Address.

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects the Parliament of the Cook Islands towards making good the Supply which we have cheerfully granted to Your Majesty in this year have resolved to grant Your Majesty the sum specified in this Act and humbly ask Your Majesty to assent to the sum and the Parliament of the Cook Islands enacts as follows the title this Act is Appropriation Amendment Act 2020.

I put the Question:

That the Address be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

Long Title: An Act to amend the Appropriation Act 2019.

I put the Question:

That the Long Title stands part of the Bill?**Motion agreed to**

I put the Question:

That the Bill be reported to Parliament without amendments?

Parliament is resumed.

MADAM SPEAKER: I call the Minister Responsible to report the Bill to Parliament.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker.

I am pleased to report:

That the Bill progressed through the Committee with no amendments

MADAM SPEAKER: I put the Question:

That the Report be agreed to?**Motion agreed to**

May I call the Minister to move the Third Reading of the Bill.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker.

I now move:

That the Appropriation Amendment Bill be read a Third time?

MADAM SPEAKER: I call a Seconder for the Motion please.

Seconded by the Honourable, Patrick Arioka

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?**Motion agreed to**

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to amend the Appropriation Act 2019.

BILL READ A THIRD TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Appropriation Bill has gone through the First, Second and Third Reading.

We will now go back to Orders of the Day on the COVID-19 2019 Bill and I call on the Minister Responsible for the Motion on the Second Reading of the Bill.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Madam Speaker, I would like to move:

That the COVID-19 Bill be read a Second time

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. You may continue with your speech.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Greetings to you Madam Speaker and all your staff in this House. To all our people listening in to this radio broadcast from the Northern and Southern Group, Kia Orana to all of you this afternoon.

I would like to give special acknowledgement and appreciation to the people of the Southern and Northern Group for your hospitality in hosting the teams from the Ministry of Health on your island. I would also like to make special mention of our people in the Northern Group for hosting Minister Tapaitau and I, so my sincere thanks to all of you. We witnessed the support from the Pa Enea in encouraging the efforts of the Ministry of Health for our response to this COVID-19.

To your Excellency the Queen's Representative and your good wife, and all of us Honourable Members in this House, to all the Ministers of Cabinet and Assistant Ministers, Members on the Government side, the Leader of the Opposition and Members on your side, greetings to all of you this afternoon. A special acknowledgement and greetings from the Honourable Tehani Brown and I to the people of our constituencies on the island of Atiu, from the oldest to the youngest, greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour.

Madam Speaker, we should all know that today, over 422,000 people all over the world have contracted the COVID-19 virus. We are also aware from the news what is happening and what is now coming to our shores. What our Government has done and is doing is, working closely with our National Emergency Task Force under the leadership of Dr Josephine Herman Tepai and those who have been selected in important positions. This also includes all of us, the people of the Cook Islands, in working together in this situation. The heavy work load involves shifting and moving our health services around, the closing of the borders of the Pa Enea so that people will not just travel readily to the Outer Islands, and the shifting of the school holidays.

There are also very important works being done right now and we see the activation of the supervisory quarantine methods which involves our people here as well as those intending to enter into our country. I believe that we all know and acknowledge the burden that is being carried by everyone as we do all our parts to address this situation before us.

Therefore, this Amendment Bill before us this afternoon Madam Speaker, the deep intention of this Bill is to grant the power and authority to certain measures and to reduce and eliminate this virus. We are aware of what this virus is doing to other countries outside of us and even those countries closer to us.

I would also like to share my appreciation for the national prayer service that we all attended which was run by the Religious Advisory Council. We all know this is the foundation of our belief in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as well as doing our own part to face these challenges.

I would also like to convey special greetings to the Solicitor General and your assistance with us today and all those who worked very hard in ensuring that this Bill is realised today.

The Bill grants the authority and the mandate to the Minister, to the Secretary of the Ministry of Health, to the Police and to all the workers within the health system in implementing certain measures that is required under this emergency situation.

We also realise Madam Speaker that we are now in the Yellow Code of COVID-19. Therefore, it is urgently needed for us to pass this Bill in the House.

In Clause 4 of the Bill, when it is enacted, this will come into effect with a limited term. This legislation cease after twelve months if it is no longer utilised. The Executive Council can also revoke the Bill before twelve months if it is no longer required. There are many very important clauses in this Bill and I do believe that all of us Members in this Honourable House understand all the statements that were fully explained to us by our Solicitor General and his assistant.

A very important provision in this Bill is regarding quarantine and isolation. This is the prevention or the separation of our people because it has become obvious that those people who have come under this process of fourteen days isolation, some of you are rejecting to follow these quarantine measures. This has added to the weight of the responsibilities of our teams in the Puna as well as the work carried out by the Ministry of Health.

In this Bill, it provides the officials of the Ministry of Health the mandate to impose testing or examination of people who are suspects of the virus, and to provide confirmation for Departments of Government or to anyone that will assist us in the prevention measures against this virus, you shall be guilty under this Act.

Over the last few days, our people have seen some of the incorrect information on social media. This Bill provides that the person will be guilty if they provide false information.

Madam Speaker, I would now like to thank the Minister of Finance and his staff for the funds allocated for the measures that the Ministry of Health is trying to implement. Although we have supported this Bill, it is only right to convey our appreciation for the allocation given to us for this area.

Madam Speaker, I would like to give my outmost appreciation to the National Health Emergency Task Force for the hard work they have conducted since the 22nd of January 2020.

To all the officials, the leaders working in collaboration with the volunteers in the Puna for all their hard work, I acknowledge you all. Starting this week, I cannot forget to

thank you all. The cooperation amongst the important sectors in our society, to our traditional leaders, the religious sector and to the private sector, on behalf of Government and the Ministry of Health, please accept my sincere thanks to all of us.

To my colleagues in this Honourable House today, my thanks to Government and the Members of the Opposition, for the assistance that we see before us today. May I ask that we continue our spirit of unity as we continue to work through these challenging times to prevent the disaster of COVID-19 especially as we move to the yellow category today. The most important thing for all of us leaders in our nation today is the protection and the health of our people. Therefore, it is only right that we strengthen our health services and systems as we continue to work through these challenging times today.

As mentioned earlier on, the Bill gives the Ministry of Health and the Police the mandate to further protect the people of the Cook Islands.

To all my people of the Cook Islands listening in throughout our country, as we enact this law, let us not forget about the power that remains within each one of us in our leadership qualities within our villages as well as within our households. The humble request to all of us to trust in our God in bringing our people together and for all our people to listen to and abide by the instructions put out by the Ministry of Health.

These public notices will be published through the media, online internet as well. Let us be mindful of those working hard with long hours without much rest and sleep through these days. In all sections and especially for those of our people working hard throughout our hospitals. We do understand the risk that you are carrying for the hard and dangerous work that you do according to our intention of protection and preservation in our country today.

There are so many of you to be mentioned but please accept our gratitude on behalf of Government, the Members of the Opposition and the people of our country for your service to our people and to our country. May the Good Lord grant you the strength and protection as you carry out your work on behalf of the people of our country.

Today, the volunteers in the Puna Teams are carrying out some of the measures within our plan and may I please ask our people to support and work closely with our villages and with our central task force. I also thank the Members of Parliament as you provide support to all our teams within your villages and constituency today.

To our people in the Outer Islands, although much of the effort of protection is being conducted here on Rarotonga, my humble plea to our people in the Outer Islands, the Island Governments, the Island Leaders and all of the people, to please carry on with the good work that you do in protecting our people in the Outer Islands. Although we do not have a confirmed case here in our country, let us not relax about it. We are still in the initial stages of this virus through the region, so let us continue to work as one people, as one country for there is so much to do.

To all our people for your great work, and the steps taken by the Governments of New Zealand and Australia in imposing the 14 days of isolation, some of our people were affected by these measures. May I ask for your patience and tolerance as we all work through these times. I believe that you do understand the stance and the measures been

put in place by Government in ensuring that this virus does not enter or cause havoc in our country.

Today, I would like to acknowledge and show my full appreciation to all our hard working nurses in the Cook Islands. Madam Speaker this life of service by our nurses although the World Health Organisation have stipulated that this is the year for the nurses, this virus has spoiled the plans of celebrating our nurses. However, we do believe that this can be some of the ways that our God has granted to recognise our nurses in returning to serve their people. Please accept my appreciation and thanks to all our nurses those who have retired and those continuing to serve our people. It is apparent as we look to the future your continued service will be much required by our people.

To all our people, let us remain calm and following the instructions and the announcements by the Ministry of Health and our Puna teams.

To end my message to you my people, I would like to acknowledge and give my thanks to all our doctors and the Head of the Ministry of Health and the leader for our National Health Emergency Task Force, Doctor Josephine Aumea Herman Tepai for the heavy load and work that you carry today. To all the doctors and nurses and a special acknowledgement to two of our doctors that have sacrificed their time, Dr Ted Hughes and Dr Miriam and those who have returned from New Zealand to assist us during this special time.

To all the hard working members and officials of the Ministry of Health, it is impossible to mention each one of you by name, please accept my words of thanks and appreciation and encouragement to all of you.

To the office of the Prime Minister, Chief of Staff, Ben Ponia; to the office of Crown Law and everyone that was involved in the response program, please accept my appreciation and thank you to all of you. We realise the work that you do and for those we do not see, our sincere thanks to you all.

And to our people, I come back to you again with a humble plea, there is a saying that you have two ears to listen. Let us not make this law to push us to follow the rules. I humbly again ask all of you to please accept and follow the direction and request to prevent and mitigate the spread of this virus in our country.

The Psalmist says, *I will look onto the hills from where my help comes but no my help comes from the Lord who created heaven and earth.* So, to all our people let us do our own separate tasks as we work together to protect our people and country through these times.

May God bless you all.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister. I call for a Secunder for the Second Reading of the Motion. I see the Honourable Tingika Elikana.

MR T. ELIKANA: Madam Speaker, I second the Motion and I waive the right to speak on the Bill. I think it has already been explained to everybody.

Seconded by the Honourable Tingika Elikana

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

MRS S. NAPA: Greetings to everyone listening in to the radio and especially watching on livestream.

I just want to put it to both sides of the House, as you can see, I am here in Parliament wearing yellow awaiting the arrival of Code Yellow of COVID-19.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member, it seems that the Interpreter has not heard you well. Could you just repeat what you have just said?

MRS S. NAPA: As you can see, I am here in Parliament wearing yellow awaiting the arrival of Code Yellow of the COVID 19 and prepare us when it gets here. Sometimes we need to put ourselves in a shoe that we do have the virus so I am like a yellow flag, my household is under quarantine, no visitors please.

I want to thank both sides of the House Madam Speaker, and as mentioned by the Minister, to all the stakeholders involved in this crisis, it is like a huge family gathering for everyone in trying to tackle this issue. I especially take my hat off to Te Marae Ora, to the Minister herself, the Honourable Rose Brown and her Secretary Dr Josephine Herman and acknowledge the great work that the Ministry is doing.

From the first day when the Puna were asked to attend the meeting to ask for their assistance, I have been pretty much involved with assisting Teimorimotia's Health emergency. Therefore, I would like at this time, if I may Madam Speaker, to put a message out to our people in Titikaveka to update them.

Firstly, I would like to thank Ali McQuarrie and his team who is heading our EOC centre in Titikaveka. I would like to thank all our Pu Tapere and their Puna volunteers who are working tirelessly to assist where they can and the role they are playing in supporting Te Marae Ora. I would like to convey special thanks in particular to our youth in Titikaveka who have risen to the occasion because we know that our Pu Tapere are the most vulnerable. I also thank the Fire Station boys who are also busy delivering water to homes.

However, we have a few hiccups in the system that we have and I would like to remind everyone in the village and especially the Puna Committees, that the dissemination of information have a structure. The instruction comes from Te Marae Ora to the EOC and then it goes to the Puna. When information comes into the Puna from the side, everyone gets confused. The plea I would like to put out to the Puna Committees is that your instruction comes from Te Marae Ora through the nurses and doctors to the emergency centre and then down to various people.

Coming back to the Bill itself, I have a concern and that is with those that have powers vested in them in terms of the communication. We have had a few complaints from cafes and cafeterias in Titikaveka where the Police had just gone onto the premises to remove the liquor license with no explanation. It is something that should have been

done in the proper manner by informing them before their license are removed, and I am sure the cafe owners will understand.

The other concern that we also have is....

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member, perhaps before you continue to talk about your second matter, I am going to interrupt your debate because we are running out of time and a Motion needs to be put to the Floor. When we come back you will have the Floor first.

I call the Leader of the House.

MR T. ELIKANA: Madam Speaker, in view of the urgency of some of the Bills that is before this House, I would like to move:

**That this House continue to sit as is necessary until all the Bills
on the Orders of the Day are passed**

In that respect Madam Speaker, it is recommended that the House suspend at 5.00 p.m. reconvene at 7.00 p.m. and that will enable people to freshen up and then take a break at 8.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. and then continue until such time we see what the energy level are in the House.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am not clear on your timing. Are you saying you are leaving it open from 9.00 p.m. until the business is finished?

MR T. ELIKANA: Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you word it to say, until all the Bills are completed. That's clear.

We will take a break from 5.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. we will come and we have a break at 8.30 p.m. until 9.00 p.m. and we will come back until all the work are completed.

That's the Motion on the Floor, can I have a Seconder please.

Secinded by the Honourable Minister, Mark Brown

You may continue Honourable Minister.

HON. M. BROWN: We have a number of urgent Bills to get through, can I remind Members to keep their comments to the facts and the matter at hand and to refrain from thanking numerous people and also to put your complaints aside for another time.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I see that the Prime Minister want to speak to the Motion.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker. I thought before we adjourn briefly, we should adjourn on a wonderful note. All the COVID test that we sent to New Zealand have come back all negative.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER: It's a wonderful news Prime Minister.

I will put the Question and the Question is:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

Parliament is suspended now and we will resume at 7.00 p.m.

Parliament suspended at 5.00 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.00 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members, please be seated.
Parliament is resumed.

When we suspended for a break, the Honourable Selina Napa had the Floor. However, before we begin, we have a few hours only. Please when you debate on the Bills, just stick to the matter of the Bill as we have four more Bills to deal with after the COVID Bill.

We are on the proposed question on the Second Reading of the COVID-19 Bill 2020.

You have the Floor Honourable Selina Napa.

MRS S. NAPA: Madam Speaker, I left off where I mentioned about the powers vested to those mentioned in the Bill. The powers should be used wisely and smartly.

My plea to our people in Titikaveka is for us to take this period of isolation seriously. It has been much difficult for the elderlies to change the life style that we are now acquiring but we have a role to play and our lives have changed immensely and we must accept it.

Now in Titikaveka, we have 14 people who are undergoing quarantine with yellow flags outside their homes. My plea to these 14 homes is that, by you not abiding to the TMO instructions and rules, you are not thinking about your neighbours and your friends. I know if worse comes to the worse, and as provided under Clause 15 of the Bill, is an area that we really don't want to go down that road and that is to get the Police involved.

Therefore, my plea to the people in Titikaveka is to stay calm, self-isolate to save a life and pray that this will not reach our country and villages.

I will end with a verse from the Bible in 2 *Chronicles* 7:14, *“If my people who are called by My Name will humble themselves in pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land.*

Thank you and Kia Orana.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I see the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Tina Browne, you have the Floor.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Thank you Madam Speaker, Kia Orana again to all of us this evening.

Our country has been plunged into extraordinary challenging unprecedented times. The Opposition recognises the importance and urgency of this COVID-19 Bill before this House and we undertake to support its passing. However, the Opposition wishes to stress the powers granted by the Bill are sweeping and extensive. Ordinarily, we would not support vesting such wide powers in a number of Government officials.

But the reality is with our beloved country now at COVID-19 yellow alert, we cannot afford to self-isolate our brains and delay proactive actions to achieve the greater good for our people. As I have said, and I will keep saying, the welfare and the protection of our people is paramount. Particularly at this time in the history of our country and we must keep this at the forefront of all of our decisions and actions.

We must make bold decisive decisions, decide our own course action that will ultimately serve to provide all of us that are living here at home the best protection from the current pandemic sweeping the world. While there is always the possibility that the powers that are vested in government officials are open to being abused, the Opposition believes that at this critical point, possible abuse is a far lesser evil than what an in country corona virus epidemic would bring upon our vulnerable community.

I believe that the Members of this Honourable House would be united in the view that we as the elected lawmakers of this country have an absolute duty to our people to ensure that the necessary checks and balances are made to avoid any abuse of this proposed piece of urgent legislation. Any measure of abuse would be to the detriment of our people and our communities. At this time, the Government and Opposition must stand together and we must give our people responsible united leadership as we stand poised to enter into what could become an unprecedented crisis for our small nation.

I do not say this lightly; I say this with great heaviness in my heart, we must be prepared for a crisis that could affect each of us without discrimination. Five days ago, the Opposition called on the Government to stop any further international incoming passenger flights. International flights here should have been restricted to only bringing in essential medical supplies, medical professionals and incoming priority cargo. The outbound medical referrals and virus testing would continue. We stress that non-essential travellers should come into Rarotonga. Unless a suitable quarantine facility is established here that is monitored around the clock by health professionals.

Outside contact is absolutely restricted and a hundred percent guarantee that incoming travellers will not fall through the cracks. Unless this can be absolutely guaranteed, then we could have a ticking time bomb. Although we expected the reality is that we cannot rely on every individual arriving here to act responsibly. And have the welfare of our community uppermost in mind by putting themselves into responsible 14-day quarantine.

I say this because information has been coming in about New Zealand base Cook Islanders returning for land court sessions, entering into our communities without self-isolation only to find that our Ministry of Justice have been suspended and returning to New Zealand a few days later. The same applies to a number of overseas Cook Islanders who have deliberately defied self-isolation rules here. These incoming travellers have put many of our local community at risk. This could have been avoided if we had put an urgent stop to incoming passenger flights.

Two things have happened since we made that request. Air New Zealand have cancelled their flights and reduced it, I understand to two next week and two the following. Secondly, the Ministry of Health has imposed supervised quarantine. Now the country braces itself for the potential impact of COVID-19. Those are not my words, but those of the Secretary of Health, Dr Aumea.

The Ministry of Health has publicly informed that 80 tests have been sent to New Zealand, 11 we heard came back negative and just before Parliament suspended this evening, we heard from the Prime Minister the excellent news that the remaining also tested negative. However, we shall not be complacent, and we should not be complacent. We should be educating our community and our population to safeguard themselves.

Our small nation is extremely vulnerable because we have very high statistics for heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. The statistics of deaths around the world show that, most of the deaths from Coronavirus are not only the seventies but also those who suffer from these pre-existing medical conditions.

In 2017, the previous Minister of Health told a regional meeting that the number of people who suffer from NCD, heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure on Rarotonga was between 37 to 38 percent. This Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, equates to one in every three people who live in Rarotonga suffers from NCD. This group is at extremely high risk of getting seriously ill if they catch COVID-19 which makes it even more critical that we do everything we can to keep our people safe from Coronavirus because our community is so susceptible.

The reality is this, our Secretary of Health has warned that if Coronavirus enters Rarotonga we can expect between 150 to 200 deaths. Based on the latest WHO COVID-19 statistics, the death rate is about four percent upwards. In the worst scenario as presented by the Secretary of Health, if there were to be 200 deaths on Rarotonga from Coronavirus, there would statistically be about five thousand of the Rarotonga population who would have caught this virus. It is for these key reasons that the Opposition made the call that it did, to urgently close our borders to all incoming international passengers.

New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern has been nothing less than courageous, resolute and clear sighted as she leads her country through their own COVID-19 challenges. She has acted quickly and decisively. Just this week, Ardern warned Kiwis who may be trapped outside of New Zealand and unable to get home, to remain where they are overseas as New Zealand's own borders have closed at Code 4 Alert. Perhaps it is time we too were as bold and decisive and tell our Cook Islanders wanting to come home, to please stay where they are, for even in supervised quarantine here, people can become very sick. Do we really want to place an unmanageable burden on our already stretched health services?

I want to thank the Crown Law Office, who took on board some of the suggestions that the Opposition made to them who were able to work with us and Government to ensure that we produce a Bill, a Bill that would perform what it was intended to.

I also want to say thank you even for the last minute changes today.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member may I just interrupt you, your time is up.

MRS S. NAPA: Madam Speaker, I move:

That the speaking time for the Honourable Tina Browne be extended

MADAM SPEAKER: Is there a Seconder for the motion.

Secinded by the Honourable Agnes Armstrong

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

You may continue.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: I also wanted to thank the Crown Law Office, for explaining the last minute changes this morning. I accepted the explanation and therefore we will not oppose the additional clauses that were inserted as of this morning. I understand the reason for including them is to ensure it is part of the package of the COVID-19.

Finally, to the Vaine and Tane Toa, our champions in all that is happening now in our country, the medical professionals, health workers and Puna volunteers that are working so hard and selflessly at this critical time, you are at the front line of this potential crisis and we thank each and every one of you, for all that you are doing in your professional calling and beyond.

To all the Police Officers in the Cook Islands who continue to provide an essential service to keep our community safe, thank you. Thank you to the important workers who continue to go to work and provide services, my thanks to you all.

Vodafone staff, Te Aponga Uira, Infrastructure, Cook Islands Red Cross, NGO's, Trades people, Supermarkets, our media workers, thank you very much. To our women warriors and our warriors who will be keeping our country ticking over as we face this challenge of unimagined magnitude, deepest gratitude is extended to each of you.

To our people, our immigrant workers, our expatriate workers we are all in this together. This Bill is not to protect Cook Islanders only, it is to protect everyone that lives in the Cook Islands. Our country is faced with a huge test of our aroa for each other, a test of how we behave in trying times. Let us come out as scoring the highest marks during this test. We must take care of ourselves. Show empathy and compassion, absolutely look out for each other. Follow the advice of the Ministry of Health and above all keep safe.

Kia Orana e Kia Manuia.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Prime Minister. You have the Floor.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madame Speaker. Kia Orana to you and all the staff of this Honourable House, Kia Orana to all the Honourable Members of the House. Special greetings to our people listening to our broadcast tonight.

It is true that this Bill that we are debating is to protect and help our people. But can I please at this stage acknowledge the presence in the House of the Solicitor General, the Deputy Solicitor General, Head of the Ministry of Finance and Immigration as well as the Principal Immigration Officer. For the record, these four has been very critically important members of our National Health Emergency Task Force and part of the group of people we have been acknowledging for their tireless efforts since we started our preparation plan to respond to the virus.

Madam Speaker, I had not intended to speak on this issue, but in light of some of the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition, I feel compelled to say a few things in correction of the some of the matters she referred to.

First, I thought we had an agreement that we will not politicise this issue and yet listening to the speech from the Leader of the Opposition, it was politically motivated. I am sorry for saying this but here are the reasons why I say that.

Last Monday, we had a combined meeting at the National Auditorium, principally to talk about this Bill, but also to bring the Honourable Members up to date with what has been happening and is happening in terms of our response to this crisis.

The first speaker at that combined meeting was the Secretary of Health who is the Chair of the National Health Emergency Task Force. She dealt with the important issue of why our borders have not been closed and she also made it very clear that Government's role is to support all the recommendations made by the Task Force and we had done that with no hesitation. My disappointment is to do with the fact that at the conclusion of her address in explanation, none of the Members of the Opposition asked her any questions of this particular issue. It is almost as if you are pointing the fingers at Government.

The Secretary of Health made it clear that it was important that our borders with New Zealand remained open. That was their strong recommendation to Government and we accepted that. After all, they are the Health Professionals and we are guided by their recommendations. That was the time for you to fire questions on this very issue, but you did not. Our people rightly asked, why not? Because, disappointingly yesterday, the same article appeared on the third page in the Cook Islands News, echoing exactly what the Leader of the Opposition has just repeated in this House. And yet, the Secretary of Health had explained everything and taken responsibility for her recommendations and the Committee's recommendations to Government. You will have to answer those questions to our people.

There was a clear advice from the Solicitor General that in terms of our people wanting to come home, there is no way we have any authority to stop them from coming home. I did not hear any questions from either or any of you on that very issue. And yet, you are still babbling on about closing the borders. Just last night on TV, I announced the new measure that we had approved and that was that nobody is allowed to board a flight to Rarotonga or arrive in Rarotonga, without undergoing a 14-days supervised quarantine in New Zealand.

May I remind you in my announcement, that measure took effect as of 23:59 last night and that was the only way we could stop people from coming into the country. So, your Government has not been lax. We have moved as fast as we can, but guided by our advices in whom we have placed our trust. So please, let us now talk about redundant things. The Air New Zealand flight arrived this afternoon with not a passenger on it, that is what the new regulations of yesterday achieved.

In fact, today our Ministry of Health has been in contact with an organisation in New Zealand, to help them and us to manage this quarantine requirement that we have imposed on everybody and anybody wanting to come to the Cook Islands and we will be in a position to announce the details of those arrangements tomorrow. So we have been working and please acknowledge that, have the courage to acknowledge that your Government have been very active and by the way, one of our Medical Doctors have admitted to me and everybody on the team, that our preparations are a week ahead of New Zealand.

Some of you are talking as if we are like New Zealand but we are not. We are tiny, we are small, we do not have our own airline, New Zealand has. We need to be sensitive and smart in how we deal with them because we cannot just confine our thinking to now, to what is happening, we have to think beyond this crisis. But the important point I want to stress in this House is that, everything Government has done has been on the recommendation and advice of the National Health Emergency Task Force. There is no point in quoting figures that will alarm our people unnecessarily.

We do not have any case confirmed of COVID-19 yet, and yet, we are together taking the step to move our country into code yellow. If that is not leadership, I do not know what is.

But I agree with the closing message from the Leader of the Opposition, everything and anything that we are doing in preparation is for the sake of our people. Although we are in Code 11 and we have not had any confirmed cases yet, we must continue with

the preparations and press ahead. So please everybody stop playing politics with this issue. This is too important an issue because this is a matter of life and death. Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Prime Minister and I think I will take that as the last debate on the Floor.

I now call on the Minister Responsible to conclude the debate.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Madam Speaker and all Honourable Members. greetings again.

The important issues about this Bill has been laid before us this evening. I would also like to acknowledge the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands for ending our debate on the Bill this evening. I support all the things he mentioned about the Bill and that we should not treat this as a political move. The most important issue that we should be looking at is the prevention and protection of our people from this virus.

I would like to ask our people again to please abide to all the request and instructions given to you by the Ministry of Health. This Bill will not proceed in a good manner if we do not abide to it. To all the acknowledgement that have gone out to those mentioned before, thank you again and God Bless us all.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I will now put the Question:

That the Bill be now read a Second time?

Motion agreed to

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to implement measures to protect the Cook Islands for COVID-19 (Corona virus disease 2019).

BILL READ A SECOND TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, we will now resolve Parliament into the Committee of the Whole House.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have 30 Clauses here. I seek leave for reading the Clauses. We will put the Question on 5 Clauses at a time. I will begin with,

Clause 1: Title.

Clause 2: Parliamentary Declaration.

Clause 3: Purpose of Act.

Clause 4: Commencement and Duration.

Clause 5: Application.

I put the Question:

That Clause 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, all stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Clause 6: Interpretation.

Clause 7: Conflict with other Enactment.

Clause 8: Ministerial Order.

Clause 9: Enforcement of Ministerial Orders.

Clause 10: Commissioner of Police or Secretary of Health, may give direction in urgent situations.

I put the Question:

That Clause 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, all stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Clause 11: Quarantine Powers Individual.

Clause 12: Quarantine Powers General.

Clause 13: Isolation.

Clause 14: General Obligation on Secretary of Health in respect of persons subject to quarantine and isolation.

Clause 15: Enforcement of quarantine and isolation.

I put the Question:

That Clause 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15, all stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Clause 16: Medical Testing.

Clause 17: Information Sharing.

Clause 18: Acquisition of Premises.

Clause 19: Acquisition of Property.

Clause 20: Obligation on persons regarding health questions.

I put the Question:

That Clause 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20, all stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Clause 21: Obligation in respect of Children.

Clause 22: Prohibition on publishing, disseminating, or communication harmful information in relation to COVID-19.

Clause 23: Offences.

Clause 24: Immunity.

Clause 25 Detention.

I put the Question:

That Clause 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25, all stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Clause 26: State of emergency or state of disaster.

Clause 27: Public health emergency.

Clause 28: Ministry of Health regulations.

Clause 29: was referred to earlier is on tax orders that was added to the Bill.

Clause 30: that was also referred to earlier that was added to the Bill on welfare payments.

I put the Question:

That Clause 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30, all stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Long Title: An Act to implement measures to protect the Cook Islands from COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019).

I put the Question:

That the Long Title stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

I put the Question:

That the Bill be reported to Parliament without amendment?

Motion agreed to

Parliament is resumed.

MADAM SPEAKER: I would like to ask the Minister to report the Bill to Parliament, please.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Madam Speaker I would like to report:

That the Bill has progressed through the Committee Stage without amendment

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I put the Question:

That the Report be adopted?

Motion agreed to

I call on the Minister to put the Motion for the Third Reading of the Bill.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: I move:

That the Bill be read a Third time

MADAM SPEAKER: I call for a Seconder to the Motion.

Seconded by the Honourable Deputy Speaker, Tai Tura

Thank you. I put the Question:

That the Bill be read a Third time

Motion agreed to

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to implement measures to protect the Cook Islands from COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019).

BILL READ A THIRD TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Honourable Members, that completes the First, Second and Third Reading of the Coronavirus Bill.

I call the Leader of the House.

MR T. ELIKANA: Thank you Madam Speaker. I would like to move a Motion:

To rearrange the Orders of the Day and that is to bring forward legislation which deals with this COVID-19 issue and have them dealt with earlier than the other pieces of legislation which deals with other matters

The Motion is to deal with the Income Tax Amendment Bill 2020, followed by the Police Validation of Reappointment Bill 2020 and then the Immigration Bill 2020 and the final Bill will be the Transport Amendment Bill 2020.

If you want me Madam Speaker I can re-read the arrangement.

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes, please, just re-read what you have just done.

MR T. ELIKANA: The first Bill to be dealt with is the Income Tax Amendment Bill 2020, followed by the Police Validation of Reappointment Bill 2020, followed by the Immigration Bill 2020 and the final Bill will be the Transport Amendment Bill 2020.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I look for a Secunder for the Motion please.

Secinded by the Honourable Minister, Vaine Mokoroa

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

We will now go to the Income Tax Amendment Bill. I call the Minister Responsible to call for the Second Reading.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you very much Madam Speaker.

Firstly, I move:

That the Income Tax Amendment Bill be read a Second time

This Bill Madam Speaker, is one of the many initiatives that the Ministry of Finance and in particular the Revenue Management Department, are putting into place to reduce the tax burden on our people during this time. This particular amendment is very straight forward Madam Speaker, and it deals with the provisional tax threshold and in particular this provisional tax affects those who are in business. The amendment however Madam Speaker is to Section 173 (3) of the Principal Act and it seeks to replace the figure \$2,000 with the new figure \$5,000.

This amendment Madam Speaker will increase the provisional tax threshold thereby reducing the number of tax payers who will be liable to pay provisional tax and that in a nutshell Madam Speaker is the Bill. I commend this Bill to the House.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I call a Secunder for the Motion please.

Seconded by the Honourable Tai Tura

If there are no speakers, I see the Honourable Tina Browne.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Madam Speaker, the proposed amendment sits squarely within the tax relief contained in the Economic Response Plan. It is as the Minister of Finance says, it is what it is for and the Opposition supports the passing of this Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister do you want to round up.

I put the Question:

That the Income Tax Amendment Bill 2020 be read a Second time?**Motion agreed to**

Can you bear with us for a minute please?

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act 1997.

BILL READ A SECOND TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. We will now resolve Parliament into the Committee of the Whole House.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We will now go through the Clauses of the Bill and I will begin with Clause 1.

Clause 1: Title

Clause 2: Commencement

Clause 3: Principal Act Amended

Clause 4: Section 173 Amended (Provisional Tax)

I put the Question:

That Clause 1, 2, 3 and 4 stands part of the Bill?**Motion agreed to**

Long Title: An Act to amend the Income Tax Act 1997.

I put the Question:

That the Long Title stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

I put the Question:

That the Bill be reported to Parliament?**Motion agreed to**

Parliament is resumed. I call the Minister for the Third Reading of the Bill.

HON. M. BROWN: Report back?

MADAM SPEAKER: Oh, did you not report? I beg your pardon; I must be in a hurry. I beg your pardon. We are going to go to the report, the Minister to report the Bill to Parliament.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker. I am happy to report:

**That the Income Tax Amendment Bill has progressed through
the Committee with no amendments**

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

I put the Question:

That the Report be adopted?**Motion agreed to**

Now I can call the Minister for the Motion for the Third Reading of the Bill please.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker.

I now move:

That the Income Tax Amendment Bill be read a Third time

MADAM SPEAKER: I call a Secunder for the Motion.

Seconded by the Honourable Patrick Arioka

I put the Question:

That the Bill be now read a Third time?**Motion agreed to**

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act 1997.

BILL READ A THIRD TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: That completes the First, Second and Third Reading of the Income Tax Amendment Bill. Thank you.

Let us go back to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Police (Validation of Reappointment) Bill. I call on the Minister Responsible for the Motion on the Second Reading of the Bill.

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

That the Police (Validation of Reappointment) Bill 2020
be now read a Second time

Madam Speaker, this Bill has become necessary because of our current circumstances. The reality is if we were to move to Code Red and have to declare a state of emergency, the Police Commissioner becomes the central figure at that time, and on the solid advice of the Crown Law, especially the Solicitor General, it was impressed on Cabinet that it was necessary to formalise the appointment of the Police Commissioner as soon as possible. In seeking advice on this issue, the Solicitor General in fact discovered an oversight, which had not been attended to way back in 2016.

Therefore, the purpose of this Bill is to correct this oversight in the reappointment of Maara Tetava as Police Commissioner particularly in the period 1 November 2016 to the end of 17 March 2020.

By way of brief background, appointments and reappointments are made under Section 9 of the Police Act 2012. An initial appointment is for a period not exceeding five years but any reappointment can only be for a period not exceeding two years. Appointments and reappointments must be made by the Queen's Representative by Order in Executive Council.

The details of the current Police Commissioner's reappointment are as follows. He was reappointed as Police Commissioner by the Commissioner of Police Reappointment Order 2014 commencing on 1 November 2014 for a period of two years, and then on 26 October 2016, Cabinet approved his reappointment for a two year period commencing 1 November 2016. However, there was a slip-up somewhere, there was no formal appointment made until 1st December 2016 which was wrongly made by Warrant of Appointment rather than by Order in Executive Council as required by the Act.

On 18 March this year, he was reappointed Commissioner by the Commissioner of Police Reappointment Order 2020 to the end of 31 October this year. This Bill declares that Mr Tetava's appointment during the period 1 November 2016 to the close of 17 March 2020 is valid and that anything done by him is as valid as it would be if he had been validly appointed.

I will accept any criticism from our friends on this oversight because it never should have happened. But it has happened and given current circumstances and the important role that the Commissioner has to play in any emergency that may be declared in connection with COVID-19, it is very important that we correct this mistake as soon as we can. Thank you. I will accept any criticism but I will ask for your support please, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: I see the Honourable Tina Browne.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Greetings to all of us. Given the situation that we are in, the fact that we have just passed the COVID-19 Act which empowers the Commissioner of Police to do certain things, and given that if we do have a state of emergency declared that his role under that legislation is vital, this Bill must be passed so that his appointment is validated and the Opposition supports this Bill. However, I would like to say to the Minister of Police that your oversight on this one and only occasion is excused. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. As there are no further speakers, and does the Prime Minister want to add more or I put the Question, thank you.

I will now put the Question:

That the Bill be now read a Second time?

Motion agreed to

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to correct omissions in the reappointment of Maarametua Tetava as Commissioner of Police during the period 1 November 2016 to 17 March 2020.

BILL READ A SECOND TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much, wonderful time to suspend Parliament from 8.30 p.m to 9. 00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 8.30 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 9.00 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: Parliament is resumed.

When we suspended we were about to go into the Committee of the Whole House. Now, I resolve Parliament into the Committee of the Whole to go through the Clauses.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Clause 1: Title.

Clause 2: Principal Act.

Clause 3: Commencements.

Clause 4: Acts binds the Crown.

Clause 5: Validation of reappointment of Commissioner of Police.

I put the Question:

That Clause 1 to Clause 5 stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Long Title: An Act to correct omissions in the reappointment of Maarametua Tetava as the Commissioner of Police during the period of 1st November 2016 to 17th March 2020.

I put the Question:

That the Long Title stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

I put the Question:

That the Bill be reported to Parliament without amendments?

Motion agreed to

Parliament is resumed.

MADAM SPEAKER: I call the Minister to report to Parliament.

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker I am pleased to report:

**That the Bill progressed through the Committee of the Whole House
without any amendments**

But I also want to acknowledge the support of both sides of the House to allow this Bill to go through the House particularly in these challenging circumstances.

I welcome especially the offer by the Leader of the Opposition to overlook the oversight of the previous Solicitor General in not picking up this mistake.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister. I put the Question:

That the Report be adopted?

Motion agreed to

I now call on the Minister to move for the Third Reading of the Bill.

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I move:

That the Bill before the House be read a Third time

MADAM SPEAKER: I call for a Secunder, please.

Secunderd by the Honourable Tai Tura

I put the Question:

That the Bill be read a Third time?

Motion agreed to

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to correct omissions in the reappointment of Maarametua Tetava as Commissioner of Police during the period 1st November 2016 to 17th March 2020.

BILL READ A THIRD TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Members. That completes the First, Second and Third Reading of the Police (Validation of Reappointment) Bill 2020.

Thank you and we will now go to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Orders of the Day is the Immigration Bill.

I call the Minister to move for the Second Reading of the Bill.

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to move:

That the Immigration Bill 2020, be now read a Second time

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Prime Minister and you may continue with your speech.

HON. H. PUNA: Kia Orana in the Name of the Lord. It is my pleasure and privilege to table for the consideration of Parliament the Immigration Bill 2020.

It is a nice break and a bit of a relief to talk about something other than the COVID-19 crisis. Madam Speaker the Bill has been a long time coming and I acknowledge the presence in the House tonight of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Tapaeru Herman as well as the Principal Immigration Officer, Kairangi Samuel who have done so much to get the Bill in front of this House.

I also want to include in this acknowledgement all the officials of the Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki, the Maori name for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration.

They have done so much to contribute to the Bill. On behalf of the Ministry may I also acknowledge the contributions to the completion of this work, from Crown Law, the New Zealand Parliamentary Council Office and the financial support from the New Zealand Ministry of Business enterprise and innovation.

Above all and most importantly, may I thank our people across our whole country from the Pa Enea to Rarotonga and beyond our shores for their engagement in the consultation process and the development of the policy over the last two years that has culminated in the Bill before the House tonight.

What is being tabled tonight is a significant milestone in our immigration legal framework as well as in the future of our little country. The truth is the change to our immigration legal landscape has been demanded by our people across all segment of our society for some years now. Your Government has heeded that call and is confident that the Bill that is being tabled tonight ensures an effective national immigration service that one, it enhances the security of our borders and therefore of our people and two, it facilitates the movement of persons into and out of the Cook Islands in a manner which supports our evolving national economic social and cultural priorities.

To paraphrase from EM5 energy agency vision this Bill allows government to deliver on its immigration duty to the people of this country. Our stewardship duty of the Mana Tiaki delivered through a security lens, te Paruru Tiratiratu and a lens of one of prosperity, Tupu'anga Ruperupe.

The dynamic and unpredictable international environment, none more so, then now has all countries grapple with the global pandemic that is the corona virus requires this Bill to be holistic and pragmatic in the legal framework it provides to manage the movement of people across our borders. This Bill will ensure that we manage people risks and maintain the integrity of borders and our immigration systems.

The current COVID-19 crisis we are presently grappling with presents in my view the most appropriate time to present this Bill. Never have our international borders come under such scrutiny nor importance than in our responses to COVID-19 in our efforts to keep our people safe.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, the new Immigration Bill and supporting regulations will manage the travel, the entry, the stay and departure of non-Cook Islanders in a manner that supports the success, safety and security of our country. The new legislation and regulations have been drafted to ensure a fair and fit for purpose and future framework that can accommodate future evolutions in available technology and the legal fora while preserving the foundation values and interests of our country and our society.

This is a Bill of huge national significance which contains 20 parts. It will have a staggered commencement process to align with implementation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration and resource capability. Madam Speaker, this Bill has had significant public consultation over more than two years with various groups in our community and is compliant with our Constitution and International law.

It is recommended that the Bill proceed to the Select Committee process given its significance and to enable its proper scrutiny by our parliamentary process as well as by our people. I will remember the support that was spoken in this House by all Members at the EM5 budget hearing in 2019 and the reiteration that our immigration service requiring increasing funding and an elevated legislative bases to protect our borders.

I seek the same support now to move this Bill forward so we may together better protect our people and the national interest of our little country. I would also like as Minister of Immigration to acknowledge the patience of our people and friends who are qualified for a permanent residence but who have held back until the passage of this Bill.

Madam Speaker in light of previous arrangements and agreements with both sides of the House, I move:

That this Bill proceed to a Select Committee to be appointed by this House

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Prime Minister. Would you like to add the names of the Members of the Committee? We need to select to form the Committee in that.

HON. H. PUNA: I have the names Madam Speaker, as I have discussed this previously with the Leader of the Opposition and her team.

From the Government side;
Member for Murienua, Mr Patrick Arioka,
Member for Atiu, Miss Tehani Brown
Member for Mauke, Mr Tai Tura,
Member for Rakahanga, Honourable Tina Browne, Leader of the Opposition,
Member for Ngatangia, Mr Tamaiva Tuavera
Member for Matavera, Mr Vaitoti Tupa

I move Madam Speaker:

That the Chair be the Honourable Minister, Vaine Mokoroa

I was going to offer myself Madam Speaker but in light of your response I humbly nominate the Minister of Internal Affairs, Honourable Vaine Mokoroa.

I also further move Madam Speaker:

That in light of current circumstances, we give the Select Committee until 30th September to report back to this Honourable House

Normally, the Select Committee would be granted three months, but in light of the current circumstances, I am sure we would not have any difficulty or objection to giving them until the end of September.

MADAM SPEAKER: Prime Minister, may I ask that you actually say that as part of the Motion, due to the special circumstances that we are in then that is why you are

naming the 30th just in case because, three months is what we require but if you make it part of the Motion, that would be better.

HON. H. PUNA: Yes, I move Madam Speaker:

That due to current circumstances with the COVID-19 crisis that the Select Committee be given until 30th September 2020, to report back to Parliament

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Can I ask for a Secunder for the Motion please?

Secinded by the Honourable Tingika Elikana

I will put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

The Immigration Bill is now committed to the Select Committee, as just agreed on with the names given.

Thank you, and we will go to Orders of the Day, on our last Bill for the night and that is on the Transport Amendment Bill 2020. I call the Minister to move for the Second reading.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to move:

That the Transport Amendment Bill be now read a Second time

MADAM SPEAKER: You may continue Prime Minister.

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, our people listening in, Kia Orana again. This Bill has been inspired by recent tragedies, but I think the truth is that the sentiments of this Bill have been lying within each of us, dormant but active, waiting to be brought out.

The recent double accident, tragic accident on the road in Pue, brought this out to the fore and I was really warmed to see the public debate and discussions that ensued following that tragedy. We are reminded every night of that tragedy, with the advertisement that keeps running on our television, asking us parents do we know where our children are. That is a very powerful advertisement, Madam Speaker, with a very powerful message.

We decided to accept the challenge that was put forward by the Minister at the funeral service of young Mona; this is the result, the Bill before this House. In many ways, the matters covered in this draft Bill were matters that came very clearly from our people. People were sick and tired of being gripped by sadness whenever one of our young ones die on the roads. These accidents have really given us a not too favourable status in

terms of road accidents in the whole world. There clearly was a voice from our people, demanding action and the actions they demanded were quite clear, because they could see it nearly every day on our roads.

One, our young people driving on the bike while using their telephone or checking their texts. At the same time, quite a lot of them were wearing earmuffs, earphones and listening to music, which in many cases meant that they could not hear other traffic on the road or even coming up behind them. However, one of the most clear voices from our people was that hey, drinking and driving does not go together, because really, it was drinking that contributed to the accidents. Twenty four deaths in five years on the roads. That is just ridiculously too high and all of these accidents were happening between Matavera and Black Rock. You can draw your own conclusions as to why.

However, for me, it reinforces the very strong and close connection between drinking and driving. I was not surprised when there was a very clear voice from our people that they wanted our alcohol laws to be changed because the truth is our current existing drink laws give us too much, allows us too much drink while still remaining within legal limits.

Therefore, one of the recommendations in the Bill is to cut down on the allowable alcohol within the blood in order for us to be allowed to drive lawfully and the limit that is being proposed in the Bill actually would bring us in line with Australia and New Zealand.

Honourable Members, we have our own views on drinking and driving but for me personally, I actually would support a zero tolerance policy towards drink driving. Without that there will always be accidents caused by drunken drivers. However, for now, we are running with the reduced alcohol limit as proposed in the Bill, which will probably allow us a couple of wines with our meal and still stay within the legal limit. However, I would encourage Madam Speaker that we continue to have this discussion about whether we should go down the zero tolerance road. There is certainly a lot of support emerging from our community for this.

But perhaps the most controversial proposal in the Bill is the compulsory helmets for all, but I believe that the discussions among our people as evidenced in social media in the case very strong support for compulsory helmets for everybody. There are exceptions and I respect that but my view is that these exceptions really have to do with our convenience because the clear medical evidence tells us that all road accidents, fatal road accidents involve serious head injuries which could and would have been avoided had helmet been worn. This is the choice that is facing us in this House.

History will tell us that the distinction between under 26 drivers and those over has not worked because I have observed personally people with no helmet flying on the bike on the road at over 60 kilometres an hour. That is inviting trouble. But out of respect for the different views on this issue, Madam Speaker it is my proposal that when we vote on this Bill that we allow Members to vote according to their conscience because I respect that there are Members with their own views on this very important issue and that in many cases, maybe in all cases they also respect the views of their constituents but I believe that the majority of Members in this Honourable House will be in favour of compulsory helmets for all.

Madam Speaker, those are my brief comments in introducing the Bill to the House and I thank the Honourable Members for their attention. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister. I seek a Secunder for the Motion please.

Secundered by the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the opportunity to speak on these issues and also to thank the Prime Minister for sharing with us his thoughts.

I would like to focus on what we have been talking about as the Prime Minister presented. The Prime Minister has shown his views especially on drink driving. I fully support his views because I believe this is one of the problems that our youth face. I strongly believe all of us in Rarotonga understands that this is one of our biggest problems, drink driving.

The Prime Minister also spoke about the reduction of drinking hours. It is stipulated in this Act, I support his views on lowering the blood alcohol level, and this includes the zero tolerance. I support his views in asking us to support this.

Madam Speaker, I have called a meeting in my own constituency especially concerning this. I also attended the meeting arranged by Minister George Angene. The Aronga Mana also attended this meeting and the Kaumaiti Nui was also present at this meeting. I heard some of the views that was discussed in that meeting. There were strong views on drink driving and speeding. There were also many discussions about the use of helmets. However, there were strong views against the compulsory wearing of helmets.

The House of Ariki also had strong views against compulsory wearing of helmets however, they wanted the law to accommodate and to suit everyone. When I read the Act of 2016, in Clause 13 – section 86(a), subsection 2, it reads, *“in Rarotonga a person who is 16 or over and under 25 years of age must not ride or drive on a motorcycle or a motorised quad bike or bicycle on any road and any speed without wearing an approved safety helmet appropriate for that vehicle or bicycle.”*

In my own constituency, there were strong views against compulsory wearing of helmets. The people requested not to make the wearing of helmets compulsory but to look at the issue and set an appropriate law for the people. Therefore, I bring my people’s views to the House of Parliament.

I will now refer to Clause 9 section 86(a) subsection 1 in the new Bill. I have a request to the House of and I would like to ask that we look at this Clause very seriously. I would like to read this. *“The effect of the new section is to make it compulsory that a person who is 16 to 35 years of age must not drive a motorcycle or power cycle or a person who is in control of an electric bike commit an offence unless he wear and ensure any passenger wears an approved safety helmet and it is free from damage and securely fastened.”*

That is the reason I am presenting my views and that of the people in my constituency to this House. However, with the other Clauses in this Bill, I fully support them. Again,

this is the view of the many people in my constituency. Their main submission to Parliament is to ban alcohol and there should not be any drinking allowed. I have my own personal views on drinking alcohol. I assured them that I will be bringing their views to Parliament.

Madam Speaker, those are my views on this Bill. All the other parts of the Bill I fully support except for Clause 9 section 86(a) subsection 1. Those are my views Madam Speaker – Kia Orana.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I will take the first hand up.

HON. G. ANGENE: Kia Orana Madam Speaker and all our people listening in to our debate on the Transport Amendment Bill. I speak for my constituency of Tupapa/Maraerenga and I fully support the views presented by the Honourable Member for Matavera.

Madam Speaker and all Honourable Members, this is a hard Bill to take especially the compulsory wearing of helmet. I have already presented my views on alcohol because most of the accidents we experienced on our roads were due to alcohol. I remember the time when we spoke about the seawall as a very dangerous area because of the many fatal accidents that took place there. I found out later that all the people that died on the road at the seawall was because they were drunk but they blamed the place to be haunted. This was just an excuse for those that survived.

There are five small divisions in my constituency of Tupapa and each of these five divisions have three Committee Members on the main Village Committee. We met and discussed the issue regarding our young people and the wearing of helmets. I fully support this Bill but at the same time, I have an issue to raise. I will share my views to the House the reason I have my reservations.

Why is it that we the older folks have to wear the helmet because of some other people's mistakes? Madam Speaker I started driving motorbikes at the age of 14 and I am now 60 years old and I have not fallen off any motorcycle. There are many people in my age group that have not had any accident on a motorcycle.

I am requesting the Government, let us not rush this helmet law as this will impact on everyone. The reason I called my meeting with all our Traditional Leaders is to ask the Government not to be in a hurry to enact the law that will affect us the senior members of our community who are abiding with the law. I believe the Honourable Members will understand and support my views. I have seen many of you driving your motorcycles and without a helmet. The reason why you do not wear a helmet is that they are a hassle and in your way.

Madam Speaker, I want to confirm to this House the position of the Minister of Health. I am sure she will support the wearing of helmet because of this is her Portfolio. However, I always admire her driving around Tupapa on her motorbike without a helmet. I want to ask the Minister of Health to support the Bill and at the same time to not support it. Let it be with a good reason because the people may see you in a bad way.

What is necessary for this Bill is to ensure that the welfare of everyone is looked after. Madam Speaker, those are my views and the people of my constituency and also our Ui Ariki and Traditional Leaders in the nation.

My final thought is about my home. Madam Speaker, many young people below the age of 18 years always visit us. These young people regard my daughter as their leader and she counsels them and constantly tells them when they drink together to leave their bikes at home and after drinking and walk home. Anyone that does not heed to the warning from my daughter is not allowed to come to my home anymore. So my daughter is a good teacher looking after the youth in my village and she is also supported by my wife in teaching the youth when they visit our home.

In conclusion, I would like to recite from the Bible a verse that taught us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. The verse says, *“Your word is the lamp unto my feet and the light unto my path.”*

So Members of Parliament, do not be in a rush, find and think deeply before we make any decision about this very complicated Bill that will become a burden for our people. I do support the idea from the Member of Matavera, where it is compulsory to wear helmet from 16 to 35 years of age and from there and above, they can enjoy the freedom of riding without helmet. I speak on behalf of my district Tupapa Nui o 'Au/Maraerenga and all the people in my village and also the Traditional Leaders that attended my meetings. Thank you all.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Minister. I give the Floor to the Member Tamaiva Tuavera.

MR T. TUAVERA: Thank you Madam Speaker. I look at the time, it is moving so I will not be too long Madam Speaker.

When I reflect upon the comments made by the two previous Members of Parliament, they have covered all the ideas about what I have to say.

I am enjoying the term mentioned in this House about electric cycles that you just plug and recharge them and in some cases, they are actually faster than the motorised cycles. One day when I was on my motor cycle, one of these electric cycles drove passed me. I have a lot of concern for our visitors using these electric cycles incase they have an accident while driving without a protective helmet.

However, I see in this Bill that there are provisions for wearing helmets when using these vehicles. I support the notion raised that those who carry passengers, it is compulsory for the passenger to wear a helmet. I am sure many of us in this House have seen parents riding their motor cycles and wearing helmets but young children behind them were not wearing helmets.

I have one question to the Minister Responsible for this Bill because it is mentioned in this Bill, will the suppliers of the helmets import helmets suitable for our children. I have asked some of the parents why their children are not wearing helmets and the answer is, there is no size that fits their children. Therefore, I would like to suggest that

we do not rush this Bill but to wait and ensure that small size helmets are available for our young ones.

In addition, I support the view by the Member for Matavera in limiting the compulsory wearing of helmets to those from 16 to 35 years of age only. One woman asked me one day, Tama when I go to church, how do I wear my traditional hat with a helmet on and how do I wear my flower ei like my Member on my side. I joked to this Mama that maybe, these helmets will have flower eis on them and when you get to your destination, you just take the helmet off and wear your ei. Madam Speaker, that is why I rose to express my views on this Bill before the House.

MADAM SPEAKER: I see the Honourable Tina Browne.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Madam Speaker and all of us in the House, maybe I will make some last comments on the matter at hand.

I would like to remind us all that the reason this Bill is being introduced into the House is because of chaos that is happening on our roads, where our young people are drinking, driving, crashing and dying. Not only this, but the statistics that has been collaborated over the years have shown us that we have a high rate of accidents compared for a small nation like ours.

When these incidents happened at the beginning of the year, there were many comments and recommendations for us to review this Bill, in order to amend and strengthen the Bill with the intention to support and protect our people on the road. We were quick to realise that there are steps that we need to put in place in this House and maybe that is the first step. I hope that through the first step that we will undertake, it will reduce the accidents resulting in the death of our young people on the road. Although this is the first step, I am certain there are other steps that we can bring into this House in order to strengthen, protect and prevent our people from dying on the road.

I lend my support to this Bill because I believe this will help all our efforts on this matter and if this proceeds without any amendments, then maybe in the future we shall look at eliminating drinking to further help and protect our people on the road.

When I look at this Bill before the House, if we pass this Bill tonight, it will become effective three months from today on Rarotonga. For us in the Outer Islands, this will be through an Order in Executive Council, upon the advice of the Island Government. This means then, if the Island Government or Councils on the Outer Islands would like to make a recommendation, this can be put through the Executive Council to become effective on their own islands.

We do know why it is like this because the majority of these accidents is happening here on Rarotonga. Therefore, I lend my support to this Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER: As there are no further speakers I will ask the Prime Minister to round up the debate.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Before I make some closing remarks, can I just answer some of the issues and questions raised by the Honourable Member

for Ngatangia. In a way the Leader of the Opposition has answered one of his queries and that is the requirement for compulsory helmets for all will not take effect until three months from the day of passing this Bill.

That is something that this Honourable House can have a good look to see if that is enough time given the current circumstances. Perhaps, we might look at extending it to four or five months in order to allow sufficient time to have the arrangements particularly the stock in place.

Honourable Member, I had a meeting with the Police Commissioner and all the suppliers on the island. But that was before we came up with our emergency response plan to COVID-19. We still have our cargo ships servicing our country and I really do not see much change in their position. They gave assurance that they will be able to bring all the required stock if we order early enough.

The Act also specifies the quality of the helmets because it has been found that helmets made in China does not measure up to the international standards. Therefore, all the helmets that will be imported will comply with the standards specified and set out clearly in the Act.

In terms of the sizing issue you mentioned, they never mentioned any problems with small sizes. In fact, the problem that they encounter with our people is that some of the helmets are not big enough. I confess, I am one of those because I did not realise that I have a big head. But they assured us that they will be able to source the right size helmets.

I acknowledge that there are large families on the island that also rely on motorbikes for transportation which will necessary mean that compulsory helmet will impose hardships on those families. However, that is one issue that your Government will be very happy to address in order to find a way to help those families and give them a helping hand.

Madam Speaker, by way of closing comments, I respect the different views that have been expressed, that is our responsibility as Members to represent the views of our people and our constituency especially. While we may not be able to agree on this very important issue, we need to respect the different views. But I also say that we have a responsibility to our wider community. This is not a convenient issue, this is a matter of life and death.

The medical evidence is very clear and compelling, the most, if not all of the fatal accidents from bike accidents on Rarotonga in the past five years would have been avoided had the riders been wearing helmets. I really do not want to feel responsible for any future fatal accidents if we do not pass what we are required to do tonight.

I said earlier that the requirement for people of a certain age group to wear helmets has not worked. In fact, for those of you with children going to College and who should be wearing helmets these pass years will know that our children have ingenious ways of avoiding wearing helmet. In fact, if you go to Tereora College in the morning, when the kids arrive, you will see all of them arriving with helmets but when you move about

100 metres beyond the College you will see them arriving with no helmet on. They only put it on when they get to College in order to satisfy the rules.

However, even more importantly, when talking to these young students why they do not wear helmets, in adverbially the answer is, well why should we, you know the rest of the people are not wearing any, then why should we? That is a natural reaction after all our children copy what we do. It will be very difficult to compel them to do otherwise but if we were to put ourselves in their shoes and do what we expect them to do, I am sure that they will react and respond differently.

I agree with the comments that in some ways we are penalising those who are not at fault but I think it will be a mistake to think of what we have been asked to do as being that. We are being asked to do what we expect of our young ones to do because we are all in the same boat. Therefore, the plea to all of us is, let us do what we need to do and be seen by our people to be doing things that really reflect their best interest and their safety but respecting any views that may be different from ours.

I think if we are to proceed on that basis Madam Speaker, our people will respect us for it. However, we will also agree with what we have to do in their best interest. However, as I said earlier, this is a conscience matter and I would appreciate it if it was to be treated in that fashion.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON G. ANGENE: Madam Speaker I would like to ask this House that we vote by division. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, as there is a request on the Floor for a Division Vote, we will do that. So, we need to turn on the corn shell to make sure that everyone is in the Chamber. I cannot tell right now if everybody is in the room but we are required by the Standing Orders to ring the bell for two minutes and can we do that right now.

Thank you. How we will do this is, I will put the Question and I will say, those in favour. If you agree for the Bill to pass through, you stand and your name will be taken that you have agreed for the Bill to be passed. So, when I put the Question and if you agree, you just stand. When the Acting Clerk calls your name, you sit until we get to the end.

When I put the Question on those who oppose, you stand if you do not want the Bill to go through. The same process as before, when the Acting Clerk calls your name, you take your seat and then the Speaker will receive the numbers from the Acting Clerk and we will declare the result of the vote.

I will put the Question:

That the Bill be read a Second time?

For the Motion:

1. Honourable Henry Puna

2. Honourable Mark Brown
3. Honourable Rose Toki-Brown
4. Honourable Robert Tapaitau
5. Mr Tingika Elikana
6. Mr Tai Tura
7. Mr Patrick Arioka
8. Mr Tereapii Kavana
9. Mr Albert Nicholas
10. Mr Tehani Brown
11. Mrs Selina Napa
12. Honourable Tina Pupuke Browne

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Those oppose please stand.

Against the Motion:

1. Honourable George Angene
2. Honourable Vaine Mokoroa
3. Mr Tuakeu Tangatapoto
4. Mr Terepai Maoate
5. Mr Tamaiva Tuavera
6. Mr Vaitoti Tupa
7. Mrs Agnes Armstrong
8. Mr Kitai Teinakore

Absent from the House:

1. Mr William Heather (Sick)
2. Mrs Tetangi Matapo (unable to travel to Rarotonga from Mangaia due to COVID-19 lockdown)
3. Mr Wesley Kareroa (unable to travel to Rarotonga from Mangaia due to COVID-19 lockdown)
4. Mr Nooroa Baker (in NZ for medical reasons)

Result:

For the Motion – 12

Against the Motion – 8

Absent – 4

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members, this is our result. The AYES = 12 and NAYS = 8. The absentees are four to make up our 24 Members.

Motion agreed to

Let us finish the process. We will read the Second Reading since we have agreed.

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to amend the Transport Act 1966 to:

- (a) lower the prescribed blood and breath alcohol limits and;

- (b) prohibit the use of mobile phones and similar electronic devices while driving subject to exceptions and;
- (c) prohibit the use of headphones and similar electronic devices while driving subject to exceptions and;
- (d) make changes to the requirements about the supply of safety helmets including increasing the fine for breach of the provisions and;
- (e) make it compulsory for the drivers of motorcycles and power cycles and persons in control of electric bikes on the road, to wear and ensure any passengers wears and approved safety helmet.

BILL READ A SECOND TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Minister do you want the Floor.

HON. G. ANGENE: Madam Speaker, I just like to make a comment on our decision. We have made a decision for Rarotonga and those in the Outer Islands. I just wanted to share this with the House.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister. I now resolve Parliament into the Committee of the Whole House, to go through the clauses of the Bill.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We will begin.

Clause 1: Title.

Clause 2: Commencement.

Clause 3: Application.

I put the Question:

That Clauses 1, 2, and 3 stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Clause 4: Principal Act Amended.

Clause 5: Section 2 Amended.

Clause 6: Section 28(c) Amended.

Clause 7: New Section 30(a) and 30(b) inserted.

I put the Question:

That Clauses 4, 5, 6, and 7 stands part of the Bill?

Motion agreed to

Clause 8: New Heading and Section 85(a) inserted.

Clause 9: Section 86(a) Repealed and New Section substituted.

Clause 10: Fourth Schedule amended.

I put the Question:

That Clauses 8, 9, and 10 stands part of the Bill?**Motion agreed to**

Long Title: An Act to amend the Transport Act 1966 to:

- (a) lower the prescribed blood and breath alcohol limits and;
- (b) prohibit the use of mobile phones and similar electronic devices while driving subject to exceptions and;
- (c) prohibit the use of headphones and similar electronic devices while driving subject to exceptions and;
- (d) make changes to the requirements about the supply of safety helmets including increasing the fine for breach of the provisions and;
- (e) make it compulsory for the drivers of motorcycles and power cycles and persons in control of electric bikes on the road, to wear and ensure any passengers wears and approved safety helmet.

I put the Question:

That the Long Title stands part of the Bill?**Motion agreed to**

I put the Question:

That the Bill be reported to Parliament without amendments?**Motion agreed to**

I must remind you that all the Members sitting in the House must vote when the Question is put. That did not sound like all the Members in the House if there are no opposition because if you are quiet, you are not doing what you are supposed to do, either say yes or no.

So, I declare that Parliament is resumed.

I call the Minister to please report the Bill to Parliament.

HON. H. PUNA: I am trying to work out how to do the report, Madam Speaker. Let me just say that:

**The Bill has passed through the Committee of the Whole House,
a very interesting passage**

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I put the Question:

That the Report be adopted?

Motion agreed to

I call on the Minister to move for the Third reading of the Bill.

HON. H. PUNA: With pleasure Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Transport Amendment Bill 2020 be now read a Third time

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I call a Secunder for the Motion please.

Seconded by the Honourable Tingika Elikana

I put the Question:

That the Bill be read a Third time?

Motion agreed to

ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE: Long Title: An Act to amend the Transport Act 1966 to:

- (a) Lower the prescribed blood and breadth alcohol limits and
- (b) Prohibit the use of mobile phones and similar electronic devices while driving subject to exceptions and
- (c) Prohibit the use of headphones and similar electronic devices while driving subject to exceptions and
- (d) Make changes to the requirements about the supply of safety helmets including increasing the fine for breach of the provisions and
- (e) Make it compulsory for the drivers of motor cycles and power cycles and persons in control of electric bikes on the road to wear and ensure any passenger wears an approved safety helmet.

BILL READ A THIRD TIME

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, and that completes the First, Second and Third Reading of the Transport Amendment Bill 2020. I see the Honourable Tingika Elikana.

MR T. ELIKANA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Due to the Coronavirus crisis facing the nation, I seek leave of Parliament for the extension of time for the Crimes Bill Committee to present its Report to Parliament to the 30th September 2020.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and is there a Secunder for the Motion?

Seconded by the Honourable Prime Minister

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

Honourable Members, we have one more business to do but before we can do that...

MR T. ELIKANA: Madam Speaker, I think it is best if you made the comments that you want and the business you alluded to, because I intend to move for the adjournment of Parliament, so I think it is better if you go through what you want to say.

MADAM SPEAKER: We have one more business to do before we adjourn for the night and it is really important we do that and that is on making a decision as to when and how we can do our next sitting of Parliament in view of the Coronavirus because, we have no idea. So if you could give us about five minutes.

I will suspend the Sitting for about five minutes and if I can ask the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Tina Browne, the Prime Minister and the Solicitor General, to please meet in this room back here, so we will have a quick discussion. We will come back and we will know what we will do for our next Sitting. It is important that we decide now before we actually adjourn. So Parliament is suspended and the conch will call you back in and we think five minutes, but it will depend on that. Parliament is suspended.

Parliament suspended at 10.58 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 11.12 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members, please be seated. Thank you very much for your patience and no problem except, each of you has to promise you will not get the Coronavirus; you will remain well so in June when we want to sit Parliament, we can go ahead with that because we think it is going to be alright. What we thought was an issue, is fine.

Honourable Members, thank you very much. It has been a very hard day for everybody but I am so pleased and I thank you very much for your work today and getting all these Bills through. I also thank our Solicitor General for being with us since 1.00 p.m. this afternoon. He did manage to sneak off at 5.00 p.m. to read a few stories with the children, which was lovely, but we appreciate your assistance to the Acting Clerk and I in preparations for this Sitting.

I also want to thank the staff of Parliament and all the seconded staff we have as well from the Ministry of Culture and also from Infrastructure Cook Islands. Prime Minister, I think it has been really excellent how the Ministries have been able to come together and support each other in times like this and also Byron for your expertise in your field. So we had two new gentlemen with us today, Chamber Attendants, one new and one

we have had before. Thank you very much for your service today, very much appreciated and of course Phillip and Anchor.

The staff of Parliament have worked really hard to get us ready to be able to do our Sitting today. Unuia and his team at the back there have done a wonderful job and all the staff of Parliament and our Hansard staff at the back. We are trying to get our staff really self-efficient in trying to do everything we need to do, and today has been a proof of how the staff have stepped up in doing their work and it has been a very smooth and good day. Thank you very much.

I call the Leader of the House.

MR T. ELIKANA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament adjourns *Sine Die*

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I call a Secunder for the Motion please.

Seconded by the Honourable Prime Minister, Henry Puna

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

Very nice to hear loud voice because we should all be tired. Thank you very much everybody.

Parliament will adjourn *Sine Die*. May I ask the Leader of the House to conclude us with a Prayer please.

CLOSING PRAYER

Sitting adjourned at 11.19 p.m.