



# FORTY-NINTH SESSION

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**MADAM SPEAKER TOOK THE CHAIR AT 1.00 p.m.**

### **OPENING PRAYER**

**MADAM SPEAKER (N. RATTLE):** Honourable Members, please be seated. Kia Orana to everyone. I give thanks to our Chaplain this morning for the wonderful words that he shared with us and that will guide us through the business of the House.

Kia Orana to each and every Member in this dignified House this afternoon. I extend a very, very warm welcome to each and every one of you who is present today. Today I also extend a very special welcome to Doctor Christopher Watkins who is the High Commissioner for Australia who has come to visit us today, welcome to the Chamber.

Dr Watkin is not a stranger to Parliament, he has paid us a visit a little while back and we spent some good hours talking with him. Let me wish you a very wonderful stay in this beautiful place and your wife.

I also thank Greg Parker from the Cook Islands Television, we welcome you today and every other day that you come and you behave yourself. Let me also extend our warmest Kia Orana to the people of the Cook Islands – Northern Group, Southern Group and Tumutevarovaro.

I only have one announcement today and that is for some reason we are still missing our Hansard Report of Wednesday and Thursday last week. Please look through your bags and your papers because if you do not return these, then the report that will be put out on the website will not be checked by you and no complaints after from you.

It is a requirement of our Hansard Division that when you are given the reports to look over your statements that you correct them or agree and hand it back. It is not good to you but it is very good to Parliament. So, thank you for that and we expected at your first break to give it to our Chamber attendant and he will pass it on to the Hansard office.

Honourable Members we will now go to our Question Time for half an hour.

### **QUESTION TIME**

The Floor is open and I see the Honourable Selina Napa.

**MRS S. NAPA:** Thank you Madam Speaker. I have two, three cents questions going out to the Minister of Finance.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary question?

**MRS S. NAPA:** Yes.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** One question and then supplementary but you can't do three questions all at once.

**MRS S. NAPA:** Okay, my first three cents question is, does Government have a policy for use of Government vehicles?

My next question is, in relation to these new energy efficient cars. Why was Government given these vehicles and is it to trial if they are good efficient energy cars and is this the way that is going to be for us in going into the future? Is there any report from the Minister on the use of these cars and that they are the way to go forward for us in the Cook Islands?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you and I see the Honourable Minister Mark Brown.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. The answer to the first question is yes, there is a policy and that policy is administered by the Heads of the Ministries who are responsible for those assets. You mentioned a number of Government vehicles that the Member of Titikaveka spoke about yesterday being very expensive landcruiser and other vehicles. These may have been the landcruisers that the Government purchased for the Police Department for their use just recently.

I believe some vehicles that were donated to the Police Department from I believe the Government of Australia and how appropriate that the High Commissioner is here with us this afternoon to hear this comment. Other departments that may have some of these landcruisers includes the Infrastructure Cook Islands, and the Environment Service and also the Ministry of Finance.

Each of these departments requires these vehicles for the projects and works they undertake in the areas which are not on the road, and a number of these vehicles Madam Speaker were funded by project funds.

The second question was regarding the electric vehicles. And again I have to correct the Member these cars were not given to us, these were purchased by Government. For the purpose of looking at converting our entire car fleet into electric vehicles. And so far, Madam Speaker the efficiency of these vehicles is very, very good.

Particularly in terms of the running cost, personally I have found these vehicles to be excellent to use on a full charge of electricity these cars will run for 240 kilometres. And the power bill that I received after 6 months of usage amounted to less than \$60. As opposed to probably over \$400 in terms if you were using petrol.

So, there is still a bit more work to be done but the intention is that we will move to much more energy efficient and much more climate friendly vehicles in the future Madam Speaker. Thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you and I see the Honourable Tina Browne and you have the Floor.

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** Kia Orana to all of us this afternoon in this Honourable House. I would like to extend greetings to the Australian High Commissioner.

I just rise to ask my question because it did not quite sound right to my ears yesterday, when I listened to the explanation for the purchase of these expensive vehicles. The explanation yesterday touch on the point that we don't want to waste our money on cheap vehicles. We want to look at expensive and quality vehicles because of their longer lifespan.

I am concerned with this statement because we all know if you didn't purchase the vehicle you will not look after it carefully. Or you will have a difficulty in caring for it and when the vehicle gets involved in an accident there is no stipulation whether it is a junk or good vehicle.

This afternoon I walked pass all our vehicles and I drive one of these GA vehicles, these are not the vehicles of workers but for those of us Members of Parliament. When I look at these vehicles, and I can assure you that the vehicle of the Leader of the Opposition, a second hand vehicle is the cleanest. It does not mean I want you to go and clean your vehicles just because I have made mention of it.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Silence please.

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** I just want to confirm that my second hand vehicle is from the Deputy Prime Minister. When I received it, the seat when it falls it cannot go back into position. I am not saying all of us, but some people do consider that if we did not purchase these vehicles, which are bought by the taxpayers, we should look after them.

I know Government last year was thinking of purchasing a new vehicle for me. I want to assure this House because of the COVID-19, I gave instructions to the Office of the Opposition to advise Government that I do not need a new vehicle.

Yesterday, I heard in this House that I have been downgraded from a second hand vehicle to an electric motor cycle. So the question is when do I get my motor cycle?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, I see the Honourable Minister Mark Brown.

**HON. M. BROWN:** The vehicle that I gave you is not second hand but it is a second driver in a new vehicle. The request for cheaper vehicles and these are the cheaper vehicles being the bicycles if that is what you want.

Madam Speaker, if I may answer the question raised yesterday by the Honourable Member regarding the new vehicles or the vehicle fleet across the Government.

What I do have is information over the last 18 years there have been 92 vehicle purchases at the value of between \$30,000 to \$70,000 per vehicle. So over 18 years Madam Speaker, Government has probably purchased nearly 5 new vehicles a year, which is quite, I thought, quite a modest number of vehicles. Of these vehicles, 63 were for Government Agencies, 14 of them went to the Pa Enuā and just most recently 5 vehicles for the newly established To Tatou Vai Company.

Now the agencies with the highly priced vehicles like Landcruisers that was mentioned by the Member, I could confirm the Ministry of Health in Penrhyn, the Police Department, the Corrective Services Department and the Ministry of Finance for the Water Project. So the Honourable Member must have been to put in a word as the Member from Aitutaki said, dreaming when she saw all these Government vehicles, Landcruisers flying past her eyes the other day.

There you go, Madam Speaker those are requested information. Thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you. I see the Honourable Tina Browne you have the Floor.

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** Firstly, Madam Speaker I have a conflict in the question that I will ask but it represents the life of certain people in our country. This question is to the Member for Manihiki, the Prime Minister.

Prime Minister in the year 2016 Government signed with New Zealand Aid for some funding or assistance for the Pearl Industry in Manihiki and it meant that farmers could receive assistance. A Revolving Fund was established and the criteria was that farmers had to repay 20 percent of their total value of their assets that they borrowed.

I am aware that not all of them have repaid but I do not know and I do not have a list or the details. But I am told Prime Minister that the fund is now being used or might be used or planned for a different use, a use that was not envisaged in the Agreement with New Zealand Aid.

Can the Prime Minister please correct me or explain, what is the position of this Revolving Fund for the farmers or the Pearl Industry in Manihiki?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you and I give the Floor to the Honourable Prime Minister.

**HON. H. PUNA:** Thank you Madam Speaker and thank you Honourable Member for a very interesting and good question. Can I also acknowledge the Australian High Commissioner in the gallery this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, this is an issue that deserves to be investigated properly and I do not think it is an issue that should be aired publicly at this stage, although I do appreciate that the people that have asked the Honourable Member to raise this question is doing it for political reasons.

I am sensitive to the fact that this was a New Zealand Aid Project and that we need to be careful how we manage projects like this. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition has touched on some of the aspects of this matter but there are other equally important aspects that needs to be covered too.

I was aware of this issue when I went to Manihiki about four weeks ago. Basically, as the Honourable Member has set out, it involved farmers who had put in request for certain facilities and equipment for their own farms in Manihiki. The list of their requirements was put to the Island Council and the Island Council in turn forwarded that to the Ministry of Finance and then to the New Zealand Government.

But before the materials were ordered, each farmer who put in a request was required to sign an Agreement to pay for the materials as stipulated. I was one of those farmers, Madam Speaker and I think the Honourable Member that raised this matter was one of them too. But I have paid my orders off and I know that some farmers did not which was very naughty of them.

So, the Island Council took steps to recover the money that was laid out for the purchase of those equipment but I believe they did that only after pursuing the farmer or farmers that had placed the order for the materials. However, when there was no satisfactory response from those farmers, the Island Council took steps to advertise these materials for sale to the general public in Manihiki.

So, the money that farmers like me and the Honourable Member paid in went into the establishment of this Trust Fund, the Revolving Fund. Of course the money that came in from the public that paid for the materials that were unpaid by the farmers also went into this Trust Fund.

I do not want to offer any views on the legality or otherwise of this fund because I have had a discussion with the Secretary of Finance to handle this particular matter. I think that that is where it should be at this stage, Madam Speaker because the Financial Secretary has undertaken to have discussions with the New Zealand Government.

I would ask, Madam Speaker that we leave this matter for now into the hands of the Financial Secretary but that I will undertake to bring a full report to Parliament when those discussions are complete and that is where I would leave this matter for now, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you Prime Minister. I see the Honourable Nooroa Baker, you have the Floor.

**MR N. BAKER:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Before I ask the question, I would like to welcome Dr. Christopher Watkins, the Australian High Commissioner to the Cook Islands. Welcome to the House. I hope as a Member of Parliament, that the relationship between the Cook Islands and Australia can be strengthened.

Madam Speaker, before I ask my question, I would like to thank my colleagues in the Opposition for selecting me as a Member of the Select Committee for Agriculture. Before I ask my question to the Associate Minister of Agriculture, I made a past comments in this House for us to work together.

My question is, have we considered exporting a percentage of our sea cucumber? We all understand that today, we have to find avenues to bring new income to help our country.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you. I see the Honourable Patrick Arioka.

**MR P. ARIOKA:** Thank you Madam Speaker, allow me also to welcome the Australia High Commissioner to this Honourable House as well.

Madam Speaker, I take heed with the question raised by the Honourable Member for Akaoa. I am a bit confuse because the sea urchin has nothing to do with the Ministry of Agriculture but probably falls with the Fisheries. Maybe the Minister of Fisheries could enlighten in that area where support can be made to support the programmes or projects the Honourable Member is alluding to.

However, the Agriculture programme is still progressing as of today under the Pa Enuu assistance for resilient livelihood that is supporting our farmers and growers in those areas. We are going to continue to look for more support under the ODA programme in continuing the growth of our Agriculture sector, not only in the Pa Enuu but also here on Rarotonga.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I will give the Floor to the Minister Responsible to response to your question. You have the Floor Prime Minister.

**HON. H. PUNA:** Yes, I am quite happy to make a few comments on the question, particularly relating to sea cucumbers.

Madam Speaker, sea cucumbers according to the experts play a very important role in our ocean environment. Currently, there is a prohibition I believe on the taking of *rori* particularly for commercial purposes. We all know that some of our Mamas love the *matu rori*, so that is still open to them.

However, I think we can remember the incident a couple of years ago when a Chinese visitor to our country stayed in one of the motels in Titikaveka and actually engaged in buying dried *rori* which apart from being illegal, actually caused a lot of stink in the premises. That was the reason she was uncovered, so that still remains today. I know that in some of the Western Pacific countries, it is a huge problem because a lot of Asian fishermen come over close enough to them and raid their sea cucumbers.

However, for us here in the Cook Islands, we are very mindful of the damage of commercial activities involving the sale of sea cucumbers. If someone was to come up with a new way of farming them commercially, by all means, but I think we should be careful in how we deal with this issue.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you Honourable Prime Minister. That completes our question time Honourable Members.

We will now go to Orders of the Day.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

Orders of the Day is on the Appropriation Bill 2020, on the interrupted debate on the Second Reading.

We will continue on the debate on the Financial Economics Stage of the Cook Islands and Government Financial Policy. When we adjourned yesterday, the Honourable Vaine Mokoroa had the Floor, and you have three minutes.

**HON. V. MOKOROA:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to all of us in this House. The Honourable Ambassador amongst us, Kia Orana and welcome into the House.

Honourable Speaker, as I was rightly interrupted by the Deputy Speaker yesterday, I was not very happy. He should have allowed me to continue speaking for fifteen more minutes. That way it will show our Public Service that we are indeed working hard for our money. Nevertheless, I could see that he wanted to disrupt me because the Honourable MP William Heather was making a lot of noise on this side, and he was right to do that. So Honourable William Heather please take heed of the Deputy Speaker's words, all he asked was to respect the House.

Honourable Speaker, because of the statement by the Honourable William Heather yesterday, I will continue to discuss as to why this Bill is not to be treated as a deception document before this House.

There are more than 250 or 300 people who were involved in the preparation of this Bill before the House. These are highly qualified, dedicated and hardworking public servants involved in different sectors and different Ministries and in the Outer Islands.

Our good Member of Parliament Honourable Vaitoti Tupa and those who have been in the public sector understand this process very well. Most of us public servants who are in this respectful House, will tell you that the process of preparing any budget irrespective of whichever Party comes into power have not changed since 2005. For the Honourable William Heather to go on record and say that the Deputy Prime Minister managed to deceive this House is saying that our 250 or 300 public servants are deceiving the public at large. In doing so, it deceived our tax payers of the country and as well as the general public listening.

Honourable Speaker, if a Business Plan that have been prepared with the intent to deceive this House and our people, should not be sitting in this House. All of us in this House understands and feels the importance of this Bill. Many lives rely on the outcome of this Bill. Many businesses in the private sector are waiting for the passing of this Bill. Many programs and projects for Government Ministries are waiting for this Bill to be passed. So, that we can get on with our much needed work. We are all familiar with the saying, *"you reap what you sow."*

Madam Speaker my time is coming up.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There was a Motion put the other day, so if you just take your seat and up again and your 10 minutes will go. The Motion was put that each Member if they wanted to can extend to 10 minutes.

**HON. V. MOKOROA:** Thank you, Madam Speaker and coming back to the Bill before the House. I am nearly finishing my speech.

The third thematic areas that the Deputy Prime Minister has highlighted is transforming our country to redefine and establish the new norm. What are those norms? Madam Speaker I am encouraged with our Manatua Cable coming live as announced by the Deputy Prime Minister. Many of our highly intelligent people such as Tata Crocombe, Dr Dwayne Malcom and many others who are capable and are able to develop tailor made Apps, are exploiting artificial intelligence as the new norm. The Deputy Prime Minister have referred to this as the smart economy.

I am also encouraged with the introduction of smart agri-tech. This is also otherwise known as precision agriculture. With the science of soil, climate, hybrid seeds, environmentally friendly fertilisers and pesticides are factored into this new norm of agriculture. The concept of the green economy incentive where we can plant more trees to offset or sell our carbon emissions. And working with New Zealand can be exploited and implemented. These are the new norms.

If we are closed tomorrow because of Code Red as a result of COVID-19, our children will have to study online. That is the new norm.

Finally, Madam Speaker let me end in echoing my sentiments and support for this Bill. It is not built on deception, it is not a dream, and it is a Budget built with integrity, compiled, prepared and structured by our own public servants. At the helm of this ship is the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of Finance. I endorse and support all our previous speakers in saying, that we work together to achieve these goals. It is not a smooth road ahead, however it is our role in this House to play our parts to deliver over and above expectations.

May the Good Lord guide us and may He give us the strength and endurance and wisdom to deliver these challenges with the many blessings to show for our efforts. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much and I see the Honourable Tai Tura and you have the Floor.

**MR T. TURA:** Thank you Madam Speaker. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the High Commissioner of Australia in the Chamber. I have a formal invitation for you, please do come to Mauke in the near future and bring your wife with you and we will have a discussion in Mauke.

Secondly, I ask you Madam Speaker for time to greet my people in Mauke. I will take 20 minutes of that time.

Kia Orana to my people on the island of Mauke, especially the three pillars of our community the church, tradition and Government. The Ui Ariki, Ui Mataiapo and Ui



Rangatira and all your village people, greetings to you all in the Name of our Lord. To all the different denominations on the islands, your leaders and all the congregations, greetings to you all. To the third of the pillars, the Mayor, your Councillors, EO and all public servants, greetings to you all. Not forgetting all the families, the elderly, parents, youth and the children, greetings to you all. Included in my greetings to the island, I extend special acknowledgement and greetings to all line Ministries on the island, Health, Police, Education and all other Government Agencies operating on the island, greetings.

I would like to thank you all for your contributions to what you have done during this COVID-19 hard times. I am very thankful to you that you have persevered in all the things that we have planned for this hard times and you stuck to it and followed it. That is how we should be operating, we should follow to what we have agreed.

This is what we have achieved none of our people on the islands or in the country had been affected by this virus because we all worked together. I would like to give a special acknowledgement to the Government of Japan, our Cook Islands Government, the Minister of Health and the Secretary of Health for the ambulance. Thank you very much to the Government of Japan. Thank you to the Members from the island of Mangaia for allowing Mauke to have this one and when you get your ambulance I will come to Mangaia to hand it over to you.

I would like to come back to Bill before the House. Madam Speaker I have nothing to criticise about this Appropriation. The way I see this Bill Madam Speaker has a very high standard and we have to look up to it. I would like to thank our young people who had prepared this Appropriation. I am proud of these young people for their intelligence and knowledge and their willingness to come back home to serve the Government and people and prepare our National Budget.

So I would like to thank our son Garth Henderson and your team, those who have assisted you in the preparation of this Appropriation and as we have heard before this House they have worked tirelessly every night to prepare all the records that it is correct and true so that what they will present to this House will be an accurate one.

One thing I noticed that there is nothing for someone to criticise to say there is a mistake in such as this. There are times when we say there is a typo error or maybe a calculation error, or the construction of the words in English. Maybe because the typing error is derived because our fingers are quite big or thick so if you press 'o' it hits the 'p' and if you press 'a' you may press 's'.

So these things will happen when we are preparing documents. When we come on the language I have been to school and in the engineering course that I did there were some Europeans and there are times during that course we would do English. They are the English people but when we study in English I always come top. I am not boasting but telling the truth. Even in the subject of mathematics I am still the top. This proves, Honourable Members that our people are capable of doing whatever field that they are in and even our children who prepared this Appropriation they have the ability to do so.

I would like to refer to the appropriation for Mauke. I am very happy for the appropriation for Akatokamanava. There is a lot of money appropriated for Mauke. The good thing is that the expenditure by each Ministry on the Island totals out to about \$800,000 and I want to ensure that this whole amount will be spent on my island.

As an example for tourism it says \$10,000 and I want to see the \$10,000 spent on tourism on Mauke and not on Rarotonga and other Ministries that has been appropriated I want to see them spent in the particular area.

But I noticed some of this appropriations for some of these Ministries it is going towards the wages for their workers. I think we should not worry about it because all this expenditure will be going into the pockets of our people to make them stay on the island. Maybe these will be people who will be voting for me.

Madam Speaker, like what I have said earlier on the amount of \$1,277,000 have been allocated for Mauke. I want to assure you that there is a lot of increase above what was allocated last year. It is not in our Budget but it is in mine. May I ask the Opposition don't go and look further into it?

Well I can see that there are allocations given to different Ministries in Mauke. I would like to thank Government especially my colleague next to me, the Honourable Minister Robert Tapaitau. I know right now the tarsealing machineries are starting to move towards Mauke today.

They have started the sealing of the road in Atiu and I believe that towards the end of this week they will finish it so I would like to thank these two Ministers next to me. So I am speaking to my island of Mauke, when the road sealing workers comes to the island be prepared to look after them like what our people from Atiu have done.

I would like to ask our Traditional Leaders on the island of Mauke be prepared when I come with the Australian High Commissioner to welcome us. I am sure that the High Commissioner from Australia is very happy because this is the first Member to invite him to come to the island. At the same time prepare your pocket when you come with me. Thank you Honourable Commissioner.

Madam Speaker, I give my full support to this Bill before this House for the Appropriation for 2020/21. My colleague next to me is saying the sun is going down and I agree with him and that's all I have to say before this House.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker and I now give the Floor to the Honourable Agnes Armstrong.

**MRS A. ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Madam Speaker greetings. Greetings also go out to the Australian High Commissioner and to all of the Members in this House, to all the people listening in on the radio and livestream, greetings to you all.

To all my people in Nga Ivi E Rua and the island of Mangaia, greetings to you in the Mighty Name of our Lord and Saviour. Let us give thanks to our Lord and Saviour for this wonderful day for His many blessings, his wisdom and understanding.

At this time I would like to extend my condolences to all the families that have come through bereavements, may God grant you peace and comfort at this sad time?

Why are we here? We are here today for the Appropriation Bill, the Budget. I reflected on all the deliveries presented to the House and contemplated whether I should speak or not. Though I had the support of my Leader, my fellow Members, there were some things that I agreed on and did not agree on.

At our home Prayer Group meeting, our text reads. This came from Proverbs 9, Verse 6. It says *“forsake the foolish, live and go in the way of understanding”*. It was this word ‘understanding’ that jumped out at me, understanding why I need to speak today, understanding why I am sitting in this House today, understanding why my people have their faith in me and understanding what my role as a Member of Parliament entails.

It entails me to make the right choices in the best interest of my people and country and it is with these thoughts at this present time, these unprecedented times to say that we cannot, not support this Budget. We need to support this Budget. We need to focus on one main factor here and that of the welfare and betterment of all our people. The situation should not be used for political gain and in the best interest of all our people we need to put these politics aside, put the cards on the table and all work together.

We supported the first Phase and we need to support the second Phase of this Economic Response Plan, this Budget thus ensuring the financial support continues to help those families and people in need.

The initiatives that have been put into place such as training, re-training, upskilling and so forth, we need to support this and push our people and businesses to take up these opportunities. The opportunities offered in the way of subsidies, grants and fees free courses. To our people, please do not abuse this offer.

I will come back to the Budget and I have a few things that I would like to express my views on. There were a few things in the current budget which did not sit right with me and that was that the assumption would be that the income would be derived from tourism operations, and this would mean that we would have approximately, 3,000 visitors per month going coming now through to December. How can this be when we know that tourism has been impacted? We know that tourism will never be the same again and it will take sometimes for us to recover in this area from the downturn that COVID-19 has created.

I also feel the Agriculture budget could do with extra allocation. We have a lot more people going into planting, so we need to support them and maybe it is timely restrict the importation of some goods.

Though the Government has allowed banking transformation and is working towards exploring our mineral wealth, nodules, that may increase our income, we still need to be mindful and look to other avenues of new income. If we borrow, we need to ensure that we can repay these borrowings and the reflection in the budget forecast for 2023 and 2024, this is reflected that we can assume we are out of debt then.

Overall, sacrifices needs to be made. We need to find ways of cutting Government costs, tightening our belt right across the board, identifying areas of wastage in Government. Put checks and balances into place to ensure that the money allocated in this budget is used wisely and for the right reasons and things.

We must also acknowledge the foresight of Government in putting money aside for rainy days. This makes good business sense, and I must give credit where credit is due. To the Minister of Finance and your team, thank you very much.

At this time, I would also like to thank the Secretary of Health, Dr. Aumea Herman, for her quick forward thinking in motivating the closure of our borders, and together with the Government, putting plans together for a safe environment. My thanks also goes out to all the Puna, nurses and doctors, but most importantly our people for their resilience and patience during this trying time.

Let us all here in this House, work together and support this budget, however way we may look at it, let us move forward and whatever blessings and goodness that we gain from this, let us ensure that this flows to all our people.

Again, I would like to give my support to this budget. Thank you very much. God bless.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Agnes Armstrong. I can see the Honourable Tuakeu Tangatapoto. If I look at the time, we should probably suspend now, and when we come back at 3.00 p.m. I shall give you the Floor straight away.

Parliament is suspended until 3.00 p.m. this afternoon.

**Parliament suspended at 2.24 p.m.**

**Sitting resumed at 3.00 p.m.**

Honourable Members please be seated. Parliament is resumed.

Before we suspended the Sitting, the Honourable Member from Mitiaro had the Floor and you may continue.

**MR T. TANGATAPOTO:** Thank you Madam Speaker and for the opportunity to speak in the House this afternoon. I wanted to convey my greetings to the High Commissioner of Australia but he is not here now but maybe he will hear my speech.

Like every Honourable Member before me, I would like to extend my warm welcome to the High Commissioner for Australia for being in this Honourable House today. But on the top of that I would like to extend our appreciation to His Excellency the High Commissioner of Australia and the Government of Australia for looking after my family and even the people of Mitiaro residing in Australia.

I was on Messenger last night talking to my eldest son staying in Brisbane. I was overwhelmed when he said Dad we are in a good shape and we are still working and

not affected by COVID-19. If the High Commissioner was still in the Chamber I would have asked him to bring half of my Mitiaro people back home and for their return to be paid by the Australian Government. I do believe that my Mitiaro people in Australia are well and we look forward to your return home and as we face the future.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to give my regards and greetings to my people on Mitiaro. To the three pillars of our community, the church, traditional and Government, Kia Orana. I would like to acknowledge the team from ICI led by Joe, thank you men for your hard work to complete the water project for the island.

My condolences to all the family that had loved ones passed away recently, may God comfort you all. Madam Speaker, I do not enjoy reading books from the beginning to the end. I can turn the pages of a book from the beginning to the end. I will only stop at special parts of the book which will benefit me and my island. Before I proceed I would like to return to the question raised by the Member for RAPA, Honourable Albert Nicholas on Monday.

He likened our Budget to a man that fell out of a boat into the sea. The question he asked us is what will we do to this man, are we going to through a float to help him stay afloat above the surface or are we going to throw him a brick which will drown him. My answer to that question is, I will throw him a float to assist him float to keep him on the surface.

I believe we must work together for our people because this hard times that we have come through was not our doing, it is beyond us. But it has happened and affected the whole world. We should not be pointing fingers at each other. Madam Speaker, when the Budget was presented to us at Cabinet Services last Friday, I was surprised because before that meeting I had this fear that we will be facing bad times. I pictured the country repeating the recession back in 1996. But I was impressed when the young people from the MFEM went through their presentation of the Bill and the good things contained in this Bill.

I came home happy because it will be a Budget that will serve our people well. There are two main areas of the Budget that I want to focus on. One is our local businesses. I see Rarotonga and Aitutaki are the islands that rely heavily on tourism. As for Mitiaro we depend on the Government to feed us. The reason being there are no economic development on our Mitiaro. That is why I confess that we depend on our Government to provide for us.

The Government is assisting the businesses on Rarotonga by subsidising wages and other grants to keep them afloat during these hard times. I have seen recently the huge bags of gravels on the wharf in Avatiu. I wanted to know where ICI got these bags of gravel from, maybe from New Zealand or Australia. When I asked the Minister he told me it is from T&M Limited. This confirmed to me that the Government is helping our local businesses.

The other matter I want to speak about is our Seabed Mining. I strongly support the proposals on this major project to harvest our ocean bed because our people have passed away not enjoying the benefits of our ocean. As the text says, “the harvest is plenty but the workers are few.”

The Appropriation for Mitiaro. There is nothing major here to me but the remuneration for our Government workers. I have no worries when the Government tell me that the completion of many projects on the islands is delayed but I worry about the wages of the workers because this is what they take home to feed their families. Since 2018, I have noticed the increases to the wages of our Government workers. I can assure you Madam Speaker that Government is benefitting from Mitiaro because our Government machineries have been with us for over 20 or 30 years and still running.

Therefore, Madam Speaker I have no doubts about this Budget and give my full support to it. Thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Member for Mitiaro. I now see the Honourable Member Tehani Brown you have the Floor.

**MS T. BROWN:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, may I greet my people back in the home land. First of all Kia Orana to all of us in this Honourable House today, Prime Minister and the future Prime Minister, our Cabinet Ministers, Leader of the Opposition and all our Members here today, Kia Orana.

I would like to acknowledge the people that put me in this seat after three elections now. Thank you for having a lot of faith in me and patience. Madam Speaker, my supporters they understand that I am a person of very few words. They know that, well I have told them that when I speak, it's only when I need to otherwise people will get sick of hearing my voice. I am sure we all understand this. So you know that saying, action speak louder than words, my people made that up for me and we see the actions coming into play back on the island.

So for that, I would like to thank the Government again but we are not the only ones responsible for that action. I should also thank our backseat drivers – my mother's CEO, Uncle Bob Williams and my father as well as all our supporters that help us push our projects forward.

It has been a long time coming since the road got started up again, the road sealing and I am very grateful for that. To add to that, Madam Speaker I didn't write a whole speech out because I don't think there's anything more I can add to what's already been said and what's in the Budget already.

With that being said I would like to thank the Ministry of Finance again for working tirelessly on this Budget and for keeping our country afloat.

Therefore, Honourable Members and Madam Speaker I fully support this Budget, thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much. Are there any further speakers? I see the Honourable Minister, Robert Tapaitau, you have the Floor.

**HON. R. TAPAITAU:** Greetings, Madam Speaker. Staff of Parliament, Kia Orana, to the Leader of our Nation, Deputy and to all of us greetings. The Leader of the Opposition, greetings to you.

Madam Speaker, if I may a moment to greet my beautiful people of Penrhyn because I believe we all understand in this House that Penrhyn is the most beautiful island in the Cook Islands. These are my own thoughts, if you don't accept that's what you think.

But before that I would like to extend words of comfort to the family of Papa Honu Ben and may God bless and take care of you. Also my words of greetings to the Deputy Pastor of the village of Omoka, Papa Tini Ford in New Zealand today and may our good Lord heal your condition. May God be close to you.

To the people of Penrhyn, the three Pillars that we talk about the Churches, the different denominations, all the Pastors, greetings to you all. We come to the traditional Leaders of the land, to the Councillors, greetings in the mighty name of our Lord. The Government, to the Executive Officers and the workers, greetings.

Those people who spoke before me they speak a lot about this but I will say this in the way I want to speak. Behind this normal man is a super woman so I know my wife is listening.

We leave it here and we talk about the main idea. First of all I fully support this Appropriation. I accept the appropriation for Penrhyn. I won't talk much on this until the time we talk about Penrhyn. But I have a few thoughts to present.

First, to the Leader of this Nation, Prime Minister Henry Puna because God has looked after and protected you since you entered politics until today. When you assumed the Prime Ministership of the Cook Islands, about ten years now. There was so many opposition trying to topple you but that did not succeed. Because I am not the only one saying this, if it is right by God, it is right by God. And so thanks be to God and may he remain with you on your next journey. May he lead you there.

To the Deputy Leader of this country the Honourable Mark Brown I don't think people gave the credit that you should get. When you assumed the position of Minister of Finance we are in a good position today.

There was so much talk about there is no money for this country, it was always on paper. Truly we should know today there is funds that has been taken care of. Because when this problem started we were able to acquire the funds to take care of our people regardless whether you were a Cook Islander, Fijian, Pilipino, everyone. How can this be?

You know I have heard when I used to come home from Aussie that the accounting ability that Mark Brown has because he only ran a fish and chip shop, how sad. We criticise ourselves. Then who is looking after our Nation. Such belief in God from running a fish and chip shop to looking after the finances of this country but all we do is we ridicule ourselves.

Come on, this is the proof we see today. Because as we go forward all our problems give it back to God. Over the time we have come through all the appropriations until today we speak and criticise it and when we look out the door so many works had taken place and is taking place. Good things are happening. I am not the only one that is saying this. Those of us in this House are saying these things.

When you look at the thoughts of the Minister of Finance during these unprecedented times, we sat down and talked. Our discussion is about the things we will do for our country. He said within the infrastructure the work will increase and I replied give me the funds. This in English is referred to as secular economy. When there is enough work given to contractors and there will be more people working. And that is what I was saying about circular economy.

I spoke this in English so we will all understand and if I speak in Penrhyn maybe you will misinterpret. To make it crystal clear I spoke in English, maybe some of you are saying it is not crystal clear but never mind.

We come back on the works on the projects. This is not only happening on Rarotonga. We heard the testament about the road works on the Outer Islands as spoken about the Minister from Atiu and the other Member. The road is so beautiful which is currently being done on Atiu. This project should have been completed by now. There were other things that happened before that delayed this work.

Today I listened to my friend here on my right from Mauke. He did not wait for Atiu to finish he just jumped in. But this are the things that we need. Yes, when we finish Atiu then we will come to your island. While I am speaking about the roads and I heard something different this morning on the radio but the person that said this is not in the House he is gone outside.

He was saying on the radio when he looked in this Budget his road will not be completed. And he said that we shook hands – gentleman's agreement. I did not say that it will be finished this year. This is what's going to happen and if you are listening from outside this is it. The road in Ruaau and the one going up to the hospital and the back road of Ruaau will be sealed. The \$3million that he was talking about is for the whole of Puaikura. And I think that is the main road that he is referring to with that reference that he gave earlier on,

I still want to assure him that their roads will be done. There are plans in this Budget that needs to be attended to before we can go on to the road. Because if we don't do this he will criticise me the more. Because the plans going forward we have to remove a whole lot of power poles on the roads in Puaikura. So, we are also in talks with Te Aponga Uira with their cables that needs to go in prior for the roads to be sealed. There was a question directed to me yesterday about the roads being sealed and then dug up and so forth. So, we want to make sure that we get this one right.

I know that the next thing will come, oh Minister how about our footpath. Maybe he said this on the radio so that his electorate will hear about it. Maybe he wanted to gain some political attraction. My friend, don't worry. Don't you on that side of the House worry about this. The less you go on the radio and speak about Minister Tapaitau the quicker this will happen.

Please don't go on the radio and talk about us. I sat in that corner there since last week until today, so I invite you to come and talk to me. Because this Appropriation was already confirmed before I was told. But do not worry because this will happen. This other person is not here maybe both of them knew I was going to talk. And this person



was saying that this is only a dream. I am not sure as to what he was looking at. Whether he is looking at the same book that I am looking at. Today it happened.

Maybe he forgot there was work that took place in Tautu. If he was saying that all the things that happened before was a dream of Government. His water gallery is finished in Tautu. So, I do not really think it is a dream. To all of us in this House we have said so many time before – let us talk. Don't go on the radio with a different story all together. We talk about working together are we really doing that.

So, we all know what Minister Tapaitau does with projects I do it for our people. I have always been in here for our people. If you cannot see that, I do not know what you are looking at. I do not push for projects to happen because it will benefit me and I do not push these projects to benefit ICI. I push for these projects for our people. The people are the first thing in my mind.

Maybe for the people in Rarotonga and not us the people of the North. When I look at the Member for Titikaveka asking the question on the cars, trucks and the many vehicles. The answer was given but then I hear the part that says there is only 14 vehicles for the Outer Islands. When I consider this it is so different. I think it should be increased and I think we have missed out for so many years. That is why that Landcruiser arrived in Tongareva.

That Landcruiser is the ambulance for Tongareva. These people said for us to source one from Raro Cars. How sad as we remain in our office and we send something somewhere that we have never been before. People are making decisions for us in the North, have the decency to speak to the Member of Parliament that comes from that constituency because we are saying not this one because it is too expensive.

I will show you an example, we have two trucks from Raro Cars which was purchased in 2015. The Deputy Prime Minister got into one and there is no floor of the truck. So, from 2015 to 2018/2019 these things had fallen apart and it should not be on the road. These are just examples of things that we can improve on. The terrain on the North that is why we need a cruiser. Even though it is \$60,000, it will run forever. Let me retract that maybe 20 years, and maybe, then it is time to get a new one.

At the moment, those trucks only last about three or four years. So, in the long run you are saving money. The Deputy Prime Minister said when I was a young fella, I use to ride with my old man in a Landrover and you can google a Landrover now and it cost about \$100,000. So, I think back then they had more sense in their head. These are my own thoughts if we buy the quality vehicles now, it will go a long way and it will be easy to access the parts from these companies.

For those of you who have the Samsung and whatever vehicles that they sell at Rarocars, and I am serious, it is very hard to get a part of these trucks to be sent over to Penrhyn. Those who are talking about the Landcruiser that I am driving, I would like to give my thanks to all the HoMs under my Portfolio, Dianne Puna, Nga Puna and Johnny Hosking for doing a great exceptional job. But on top of that, let us thank God for giving us the knowledge because we don't have the wisdom. It does not matter what qualifications you have, if you don't believe in God you are nothing. These are my thoughts.

Before I finish, I have one more thing to say to our people. Pray to God. My thanks to the Minister of Health and all your staff, for what you have done during the period of COVID-19. To all our people that worked during this time, May God bless us all. To my friend from Akaoa, thank you for doing your job with the trimming of our trees around the island. To our Minister from Tupapa and your workers, thank you for your hard work.

The reason I am congratulating these two, maybe it will offend those people who are tree huggers. When you build the roads, it is for me, a safety issue to have trees or branches over hanging on to our roads to be cut. Because there will come a day that a disaster may happen. Who are we going to blame? So, for these work that is being done it should be commended. The place in Karekare, there are some people who are not happy for the cutting of the trees, but when you look at it today, it is beautiful.

To the Member for Matavera, Chris Vale and I talked today. I told him to wait until Matavera is finished then we will not talk about it again. I thank the people at ICI and also the Ministry of Health. I am sure that all the Members of Parliament are happy with the work undertaken by ICI to clear the drains so please commend the good work that you see done for the people. You had many things to say about the drains not being cleared but it is done today.

I reiterate my full support for this Appropriation. My friend from RAPPa, maybe he is right that the Minister of Finance has a doctorate in this field. As mentioned by the Member for Nikao, people are saying that we are deceitful. The Pastor that delivered our service said that we should return the praise and thanks to God. Thank you Lord for all the blessings that we are receiving today. Thank you Lord that this disease is not in our country and thank you Lord for all the things that you do for us.

God Bless and Kia Orana.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Minister, and I see the Honourable Selina Napa.

**MRS S. NAPA:** Kia Orana to all of us this afternoon. Greetings from me to the Queen's Representative and your good wife. To the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister and all Cabinet Ministers and all Members on the Government side, Kia Orana. To the Leader of the Opposition, and all our Members in the Opposition, Kia Orana. Greetings to you Madam Speaker, your Deputy and all the staff of Parliament.

I convey special acknowledgement to all the church leaders in our country for all your prayers for our country during this trying times of COVID-19. To all our traditional leaders, thank you for your good work in uniting our people together. Special greetings from me to all the women of our country. I noticed that throughout this time that we have come through, all our women have been strong in holding our families', village and country together. I see this with the support they give their husbands in planting food for the family, even planting flowers and the way the home is persevered.

Before I say something in contribution to the Appropriation Bill before the House, may I be allowed to convey my greetings to the people in my constituency. Firstly, to Papa Tiki Matapo and the family, may God give you comfort and hold you together. So, sad

for the passing away of Aunty Mii, as I recall the last time I met up with them. It was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February at the Auckland airport. I waited for them at the transit area as they were on their way to the hospital. As we bid farewell, I told them that we will meet again in Rarotonga. I agree with the scriptural verse given for her in Proverbs 31:10 *“Who can find a virtuous woman for her price is far beyond rubies.”*

I noticed also in my village of Titikaveka, there is an increase of burglaries in the homes and our leaders are trying ways to protect this from continuing. I would also like to thank our Ministry of Health for giving this time to developing all our Puna so that each of them can be self-sufficient to look after our people. I would also like to commend and to continue praising our volunteers who had given all their time to support our Puna so that it will run well to care for our people.

I would also like to thank Te Aponga Uira and Vodafone for what they have done in reducing the burden to be put on our people during this period. Thank you to Vodafone for putting the relay equipment at the Titikaveka fire station to enable the village to capture the radio signal from FM 101. I also thank the good brother Arthur Pickering and his Polynesian Car Rentals for your continual support in providing free transport to all the Puna around Rarotonga. Not only the free transport but he also gave his staff to help the needed work in all the Puna.

I would like to convey my appreciation to the Minister of Health, the Minister of ICI and the Minister of Corrective Services because it is not just the COVID-19 that we faced during that time even the dengue fever. So thank you for the support through these Ministries that we have overcome the problem during this time of the COVID and dengue. May the Lord continually give you the wisdom, the strength as we work together in building our Nation.

Since the time when we entered into this new building, we see the beauty that has been done. You remember Madam Speaker with the support of the former Clerk of the House, they were rallying together to get the support to have this Parliament completed. I am very proud to stand in the midst of this House and to you, Madam Speaker and also former Clerk, Papa Tangata for what you have done and all those who were involved to make this possible. I think the three words that fits Papa Tangata, he was dedicated, enthusiastic and committed. He was a go-to-person for help and had a wealth of knowledge in regards to Parliamentary work. That is why I say I miss him in this House.

Coming back to this Bill. I am excited to hear the Government side asking Opposition that we should hold hands together and work together. That is so true, I agree that we should all hold hands together, walk together because we are not really sure what will happen to us in the future.

Whatever has been said but I would stand and with my colleagues that we will support this before the House. This is our path from the Opposition to be critical and to criticise some of the things that is not proper in the House. What I am sad about is, this is the only time that the Government has been asking us to join with them and hold hands with them at this time. But at an important part where we need to have discussions and work things together on how we can move ahead, they never come and talk to us.

For me I agree with you that we should hold hands together and that together we will walk ahead from now until the end of the year.

So I come back to this Appropriation, I was listening to the Honourable Member Tamaiva Tuavera talking about issues on Marine and I totally agree with him with aqua farming as a way to diversify our economy. I see this as new money coming into our country.

Other areas that has been mentioned by the Honourable Member for Akaoa concerning sea cucumbers I know that this is a new area and also seaweed farming. I was watching on the screen and maybe it might be a problem how we should start it and I think these are genuine fresh ideas that we should consider.

Another field that I want to comment on the licences being given to these Fishing Companies fishing in our ocean. I am hoping that Government have taken on the idea of considering and renegotiating the fishing licenses issued for better prices and deals given our economic recession.

One of the areas that I discovered from the Books and I would like to comment on that it talks about low fish prices sold to these licenses have impacted fisheries revenue and the uncertainty into the 2020/2021 year looks bleak. It seems to me that COVID-19 is to blame for this outlook and maybe because of this that is why we are trying to diversity in other ways of getting income to us.

I come back to the Environment Services. I notice part of the appropriation has been given to the disposing of machineries and white ware. I haven't seen any allocation of such but maybe in other areas because I know I am not the only Member of the House who have asked for this concerning the dengue fever on the island. So I would like to ask the Honourable Minister to look into this matter on how we can reduce and eliminate dengue before it starts spreading to the Outer Islands.

In regards to the concern by the Member of Parliament from Akaoa with regard to the cutting of trees. I think that it also touches the Environment Services for them to have a look into the tree trimming programme because there are times when you need to cut some trees overhanging over the road. They are required to come and assess whether to allow it to be cut or not. I haven't seen any allocation for such maybe as we go through someone will identify where that is.

I come back to the public sector staffing especially in Government. There are certain Ministries that I have concern with the increase in staffing and especially during this COVID period, why? And when we see it's not a core service and not even affected by COVID.

For example, when I look at the Vote Item for the Environment Service because it shows in this Book that their score card development of concern and no change since the previous year. So what is the connection of increasing staffing to the COVID and hopefully they will learn from this to improve services.

With regards to the Vote Item for Crown Law, they have an increase in personnel. Is it a core service? Why I say this is because the Seabed Mining was passed last year

and now coming back for more amendments. The COVID Bill underwent minor changes and these Bills should not be rushed without thorough checking.

There are other Ministries that their personnel have increased so the point I am trying to make here is, in times of recession which we are in now and going forward for how long, why are we increasing personnel? At this time, we should be increasing productivity with our current staffing. Meanwhile the private sector is suffering. The economy is driven by private sector. The people that was driving our economy are being laid off and getting paid minimum wages while the pen pushers like us are being paid maximum benefit.

I have also heard the Minister of Finance say that no new posts are to be allocated and all surplus money to be saved to tackle the recession. That is why I have brought to mind the increase of the personnel budget for the Ministries as they have increased.

Yesterday also, I heard the Acting Finance Minister praising the Minister of Finance and also himself. I think he should leave it to the Opposition to praise him or maybe the people to praise him, but no, he praised himself.

To end my message Madam Speaker, we know the finance situation that is surrounding our country, we all need to have a huge responsibility to take all the warnings seriously and practice what is being lectured. Because in order to minimize the pain, we have to try and get through this in the best possible way. Budget and survival have to be the objective because they will quickly be a limit reached as to how far and how long Government can continue its assistance.

We should be applauding all the measures being adopted and pray that the COVID do not reach us. As for all of us, our greatest concern is the community. If it takes hold are we able to cope? If the Minister for Health can advise whether we have received the protection suits and the testing kits yet because from what I have seen at the community level we cannot keep relying on the volunteer's assistance as they all have lives to get on with in the community and their families. But I know for sure that we are all ready and pray also that we all take the resources in place to tackle this issue. We must stand together, we must make decisions that is in the best interest of the wellbeing of our people, which is foremost.

I suppose that the Government is waiting what are my thoughts on this Appropriation Bill. I strongly support this Bill because there are many of our people in the community who are working together with us in supporting their own families. God Bless our Paradise.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Tina Browne, you have the Floor.

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** Greetings once again this afternoon. To all of us in this House, greetings again. I also give greetings to the women folk in the Hansard Office, the Kitchen Ladies and all the caterers who have provided our lunch in the past few days, may God Bless you all.

To the Queen's Representative and your good wife, as well as to all our people listening to the radio and watching the livestream, the three pillars we usually mention, greetings in the Name of our Lord.

I would like to extend a short greeting to the people of Tapuahua, the three Church denominations on the island, the Mayor and your wife, the EO and your wife and your families, Government workers and all those who hold titles, Kia Orana. To our elderly people and the young children, greetings to you all.

I would also like to greet all the women folk of this country because the message that I will give on the Budget will reflect the women folk of this Nation.

I wish to give a condolence message to the families on Rakahanga and Manihiki for the passing of Porohunoa Teanini and brother Papa Honu Ben and also to Papa Tiki Matapo and the Kokaua family and also Papa Koekoe Mokotupu and his family. Please accept my sincere condolence and also from the Members of the Opposition.

I think we forgot to give greetings to one part of the community, not intentionally, and that is the Chamber of Commerce. I want to extend a special thank you to the Chamber of Commerce, the President and his Executive and those that have volunteered to assist both our public and also Government in implementing the Response Plans.

I want especially to thank them for the initiative that they have taken to engage with Government and it is all for the good of our people. Thank you very much to you all.

Since Monday, I have been listening to different views of Members on the principles and merits of this Budget. It is easy for us to see the people who are pretending to be clever and the people who are playing politics, and yet, we have all agreed that we will not play politics during this time of COVID-19 and we have told Government that we will support the Budget during this period of COVID-19 and yet, we are hearing insinuations that maybe we are objecting the Budget.

Yesterday, I heard the Member for Murienua and his comment, the way I heard it is that most of us did not go to the Budget breakfast on Friday. Maybe he is implying that because we did not attend then we don't know what we are talking about. I want to reassure the Member that I have read the Financial Statement but I cannot confirm that I understand it properly but that is for you to weigh up at the end of today's Sitting.

Before I present my thoughts on the Budget, I want to give my qualification regarding financial matters. Because when we look into the Financial Statement, the pages are not numbered but when I count it is page 5. This is what it says – when a household enters a period of reduced income they have several options. They can opt to spend less money, they can borrow money or they can find a way to earn more money.

Now when we talk about the household the Minister of Finance in the household is the Mama, is the wife. I am a wife and I have learned to budget over the last forty years and we all the Mamas in this Parliament have had the experience of budgeting.

I am happy to hear Minister Tapaitau describe his wife and commend her because as he has said it is because of his wife that's why he is successful. So for all the women

listening to the radio, many of us don't realise that we are budgeting and yet we are, day after day, year after year.

I will give you a small example why I say this is so. When the Papa gives \$200 to Mama for food and clothing for the family, the Mama is able to make sure this \$200 is enough for the family.

If the Papa's income is from planting the Mama is able to put aside some funds for a rainy day. The Mama realises sometimes the crops are not sold or some of the crops are damage by flooding so she is able to allocate some reserve for a rainy day. Sometimes when Papa's crops are spoilt by flooding, that means Papa does not have \$200 and Mama then utilises her God given talent whether it's weaving or baking cakes to sell at the market or even tending the taro patch or dress making. Mama will look for ways to earn money for food for that week.

So I suppose that's what the Minister is referring to when he likens the household, how we run the household and Government coming up with a Budget. Now the similarity ends there.

In the case of Government, I understand that it's more difficult. Decisions are normally made based on certain realistic assumptions. We all agree that these are unprecedented times and so we should be careful with the assumptions and the data that we rely on. It is no surprise that the Financial Statement by the Minister of Finance paints a very optimistic forecast and outlook. To some extent it's understandable. It paints a picture that we are fine.

I say an optimistic forecast because it appears to be based on certain assumptions and you find these assumptions in Book 1, Page 27. I struggle with these assumptions for three reasons. The first it appears to be based on historical strong growth periods. It is that growth that is driving the forecast figures in the Budget.

Second, if you have a look the assumptions do not make any reference to COVID-19 and its impact. Let me explain why I say that the impact of COVID-19 has either been ignored or down played. We have already experienced the disastrous impact of COVID-19 yet no one has tested positive in our country. The impact on our Tourism Industry since the lockdown have been instant and devastating. We are still to experience the first and the second wave.

The third matter I think that has not been taken into account in the assumptions is our cyclone season. My point is that if these assumptions are to be taken into account, for example if COVID-19 does enter our country it will throw these figures way out the window. The figures I talk of are the revenue column.

Right now we have no tourists because of the border shutdown. A couple of weeks ago we were hoping for a lifting of the border once New Zealand return to Level 1 Alert. Then the news came that two ladies slipped into the country and now New Zealand has, I am not quite sure ten persons in isolation.

We ask ourselves what that means for us. It means we will have to be extra cautious when we do lift the border and we do need to lift the border if we are going to encourage tourists to enter our country. It may be that the tourist arrivals will be further delayed.

We heard the Minister say the other day that he was in talks with the Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand and we hope and I especially sincerely hope that those discussions will be fruitful.

Normally our winter period in the Cook Islands are the peak seasons for tourism. Government estimates that we will expect 18,400 tourists between now and Christmas. If you work out the numbers it doesn't make sense. Per average that's 3,000 tourists for the next six months and that's assuming that we have no cyclone in November and that we have a steady flow of tourists during those months if the border is lifted. This is the dream that we are talking about.

The Honourable Vaine Mokoroa was critical of Honourable Kitai because of his reference that this Bill is a nightmare. I have not reached the area of nightmare. I am still in the dreaming stage. We all know that come September, it's also in the Financial Statement, come September we need more oxygen.

Now we also know that our cyclone season is November - April. Should a cyclone hit us what does that mean to our industry and what happens to the funds that we have grabbed to assist us during this period? And yet this dream is that our tourist numbers for the year will reach 124,000. That is so overly optimistic in my view. It is plainly unrealistic. If these numbers are not correct this is what it means, this Appropriation is in error.

Let us do an analysis of our revenue and expenditure. Our total revenue for 2019/20 was \$189 million compared to the forecast for 2020/21 of \$125 million a huge decrease of \$64 million and I can understand and accept that because of COVID-19.

Our actual total expenditure for 2019/20 was \$188 million compared to 2020/21 of an increase to \$234 million an increase of about \$46 million and I have no problem with that because Government and we have supported the Stimulus Packages that needs to go and assist our people.

This is what all of this means to me. I understand that the revenue will decline because of COVID-19. However, as I have indicated earlier and I stress it is my firm view that the estimated revenue has been grossly over-estimated.

The big increase in expenditure supports Government's policy to stimulate the economy however, it puts pressure on Government to seek more foreign aid and increase borrowing.

The Financial Statement tells us that for us to survive until September we have had to dive into our Reserve Funds. So if we for example in addition to the COVID-19 problems that we have, if we have a cyclone at the end of the year then what do we do then. This is what we say in the North "mea pehea ai". That is why we the Opposition are cautioning us on your side and all of us to be very careful of our expenditure. We



should be careful because if the revenue stream is incorrect during this period, it will show that there will not be any funds to pay wages then our situation will diminish.

This is an Appropriation Bill that we had no alternative but to support and to keep our fingers tightly crossed and the reason for that is none of this is within our control. COVID-19 is not within our control, cyclones are not within our control.

So to the Minister of Finance, for the sake of our people I will definitely keep my fingers crossed and toes crossed and I agree with the Minister Tapaitau we need to Pray every day, every week to make sure that these events do not happen because if they do then the Member Kitai's description of a nightmare we will reach that nightmare then.

Concerning line Ministries I want to make a contribution when we come to those, I just wanted to indicate where my problem area is so that if in September everything goes well, why not we have done well. So I support this Budget. Thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Tina Browne. Can I just have an indication how many more people will be debating on the Budget? So that was our last debate, oh right. Thank you. I call the Leader of the House to move a Motion please.

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

**That Standing Order 54 (2) which relates to Sitting days and hours of Sitting of this Parliament be suspended to enable Parliament to sit on Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020 so to permit more time to debate the Appropriation Bill 2020 at the following times. That we start the day at 9.00 a.m. until 11.30 a.m. then we take a break from 11.30 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. and then resume Parliament from 12.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m. take a break from 2.30 p.m. to 3.00 p.m. and resume Parliament from 3.00 p.m. until 5.00 p.m. when we adjourn for the day**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Member. Is there a Seconder for the Motion?

**Seconded by the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera**

Honourable Members, I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

Now we are at the end of the day and we will now adjourn until tomorrow morning Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> at 9.00 a.m. Can I ask somebody to finish us off with a Prayer please?

**CLOSING PRAYER**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Parliament is adjourned until Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> at 9.00 a.m.

**Sitting adjourned at 4.59 p.m.**