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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.

Greetings and welcome to each Honourable Member in this dignified House this afternoon. I extend our greetings also to the people of the Cook Islands surrounding the Northern Groups, Southern Groups and Tumutevarovaro.

This morning I would especially like to send our love and deepest condolences to Papa Tiki Matapo as he has just put Mama Mii, his wife to rest this morning. I was very fortunate as a nurse when I returned from New Zealand to work under the leadership of Aunty Mii Matapo as the Matron up at the hospital.

She was a strong, very good leader and stuck to what is right and would not waiver, if you try to ask her to do something other than that. As the first Matron of the Rarotonga hospital, I know that nurses of the Cook Islands have looked up to her and followed her teachings and I certainly appreciate her leadership. May our Heavenly Father and our good Lord take good care and look after Papa Tiki, his children and the family for their loss.

Honourable Members, we do not have a lot of announcements for today and so we will just continue with our Question Time.

QUESTION TIME

So, for half an hour the Floor is open. I see the Honourable Deputy Speaker and you have the Floor.

MR T. TURA: Kia Orana Madam Speaker, to all Members of this House and those listening in. I have a question to probably the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister or the Honourable Speaker.

Last Friday, I was disappointed and a bit mad with the newspaper. I think they changed the way the Honourable Member for Amuri-Ureia asked his question last week. The newspaper blamed the Members of Parliament for the intentions to increase our allowances. I do not think that was the intention by the Honourable Member for Amuri-Ureia.

So, I would like to ask the three Members I mentioned earlier to clarify this or can we try and get these reporters out of Parliament for false information to the public. Thank you Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana Honourable Members and our people listening in.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, this is a very important question. We need to give it the seriousness that it deserves because reading the newspaper last Friday, the headline suggests quite clearly and intentionally that all Honourable Members of this House are just concerned about looking after ourselves during these difficult times. So, Madam Speaker I rely on two Standing Orders in responding to the question on the Floor.

First of all, Standing Order 90, to explain a matter of personal nature because we each were tarred with the same brush and I take very strong exception to such an action. The other Standing Order Madam Speaker is Standing Order 377, where this Honourable House through your good self can take appropriate action to show its displeasure and objection to any incorrect reporting of proceedings in this House.

The truth is, what was reported in the newspaper is absolutely incorrect and it seems designed to invoke excitement among the people that we are just looking after ourselves. And yet, we all know what was said and what was done in this House. So, for me our integrity is at stake here and if we all agree, then we must take appropriate action. As I remember it, the Honourable Member for Amuri-Ureia raised the question about entitlements.

He never asked for any extra allowances, he was merely inquiring as to the entitlements for MPs from the Outer Islands who are residents in their constituency. He made the point quite rightly, that there appeared to be a difference between Outer Islands MPs who reside in Rarotonga against those who reside in their own constituencies. That was the question, he did not ask for an increase in allowances and the Minister of Finance in response pointed out that the appropriation had already been done and was in the current Budget.

But queries of that nature on that issue should be directed to Parliament because they administer the Civil List and yet, the poor MP was held out by the paper to be greedy. I mean, that is a total misrepresentation or misreporting of what was actually said in this House. But to also go on and say that all MPs were actually doing that is just totally defamatory.

Honourable Members, Madam Speaker; we all believe in the principle of the freedom of the media. We all believe that they have a big part to play in our democracy, but we also believe with that freedom comes responsibility. They just cannot print whatever they want to print. There are laws in our country against things like that but for me Madam Speaker, what was reported in the newspaper last Friday had crossed the line.

We have an obligation in this House to protect our integrity and our reputation and take whatever appropriate action is necessary to do that.

This is not the first time that this newspaper has done this. While they may have gotten away with these things in the past, we must never allow them to get away from this responsibility now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker those are my comments in response to the question. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Prime Minister. I see the Honourable William Heather; you have the Floor.

MR W. HEATHER: Madam Speaker, please allow me to comment on the topic that the Prime Minister has just spoken on. Madam Speaker, when I returned home that day my family asked me the question. “Hey you people are greedy, you are paid a salary and now you want an increase.” But Madam Speaker, I explained to my family that we were not asking for an increase but an explanation regarding the allowances of Outer Island Members.

My question goes to the Minister of Infrastructure, the Honourable Robert Tapaitau. I did not have time to go and look this morning, but I looked at the Budget Book and went to the funeral in Titikaveka. So, what is happening to the road works in Arorangi? Has it started today or what? That is my question. Thank you.

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

HON. R. TAPAITAU: Madam Speaker, Kia Orana and all of us in this House, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord.

Thank you for the good question and this is the good answer. We have had discussions between myself and the Honourable William Heather from Ruaau. This has been a pressing issue for him in the past few years and I do not want to go further back to the previous years, which were so at that moment the then Minister of Infrastructure. There is no blaming game here. So I think the answer that the Honourable Member for Ruaau will want to listen to is, the roads in Ruaau is not in a good state at the moment due to pipe digging and pipe laying that took place a couple of weeks ago. We are waiting on the pressure tests to be finalised before we can attend to the roads in Ruaau.

Just before I finish off, you will probably ask this question so I will deal with it now. He had asked in previous Parliamentary Sessions about the road going up to the hospital. What we are waiting on is also for the pressure testing that will happen in Nikao. Once that is done then we will do the roads from Nikao up to the Hospital and down to Ruaau. So hopefully that answers the question. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable Selina Napa.

MRS S. NAPA: Greetings everyone this afternoon. My question goes to the Minister of Infrastructure or the Minister for Te Mato Vai. If either Minister can explain in this House Madam Speaker, why these pipes recently have been dug up? Is it because they

are leaking? If they can also explain, if this is an extra cost to the tax payers of this country or is the contractor covering the added cost?

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

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker. In relation to the question on the remedial work that has been done on the pipes, this is part of the Government's quality assurance. When we finish a project, Madam Speaker there is quality assurance process that takes place to make sure that the Contractor has fulfilled their requirements.

In this case, it was found that the joints in these pipes did not meet the specifications that we asked for that we would expect to last for a hundred years. It was found that some of these joints were not done to the correct standard therefore, the decision was made to replace them, even though these pipes were not leaking. That is the work that we are seeing now being conducted currently in Titikaveka.

There is no additional cost to the people of this country in the work that is being done. As Members will be aware, this was a tripartite project between the Cook Islands Government, the New Zealand Government and the Chinese Government. The first type of project ever undertaken by three Governments in the world which included the Government of the People's Republic of China. As I said, this is the first time this has ever been done in the world and something for us to celebrate. At the end of the day, it is still a project and the project must live up to its specifications.

The cost of this remedial work, Madam Speaker is covered by the Government of New Zealand. There is no additional cost to the taxpayers of the Cook Islands. The remedial work was tendered out and was won by local company, Land Holdings. So an additional blessing if you like, Madam Speaker as this provides much needed work into our community. Much needed work for the companies but also it will be able to deliver much better cleaner consistent water for our people.

The Ministry of Finance is currently undertaking actions with the Chinese contracting company to recover costs for the work that we considered below standard. This is an ongoing process and is currently in arbitration and we will let this legal process take its due course. Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable Selina Napa.

MRS S. NAPA: Madam Speaker, I have one more question for the Minister. As we see that the roads are being tar sealed around Rarotonga, if he can give information to this House, whether after the tar sealing of the roads that there are any chances of the roads being dug up again.

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

HON. R. TAPAITAU: Yes, I have been waiting for that question because she asked that question and in the past years there has been different questions. It seems that these questions are blaming the Minister of Infrastructure or the Ministry of Infrastructure. I do not dig up the roads, it is done by other agencies. We have discussed at the Ministry

of Infrastructure but we are also in discussion with Vodafone and Te Aponga Uira because they are the ones that dig up the roads.

When you all look at it, considering since you were small and most of you are older now, our roads have been dug since then, until now. The people before me, did they look at this problem? So I suggest when you ask your question ask in a way that I can support and discuss then move forward.

Regarding our roads, questions will always be asked. There will be people that will not be happy and people that will be happy. The Papaa saying goes, “you are damned if you do and you are damned if you do not.” But do not ask a question that places blame. It is not nice.

MRS S. NAPA: Point of Order Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes Honourable Member, what is your Point of Order?

MRS S. NAPA: Madam Speaker, the question was a simple one to be answered. There was no need to go around and say all sorts of things. As we have seen over the years, the roads have been tar sealed and dug up again and it is still happening today. He is right and this has been happening for some time.

As we see it today, the roads have been sealed and it looks great, but the question is, when will this be dug up again?

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and can the Honourable Minister just answer the Members question.

HON. R. TAPAITAU: And my simple answer to the Honourable Member’s question is, if you want to know, ask Vodafone and Te Aponga Uira when they will dig up the road again. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera and you have the Floor.

MR T. TUAVERA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to all Honourable Members this afternoon. I was not going to stand and ask this question but when I heard the answer from the Deputy Prime Minister on Te Mato Vai, it prompted me to ask the question, because I am a Member of the Select Committee of Te Mato Vai and the Deputy Prime Minister is the Chairman.

All of the workers from the Te Mato Vai came to Parliament as witnesses before the Select Committee. The problem discovered was the welding of the joints of the pipes. The staff members of Te Mato Vai claimed that the welding is the best and second to none or words to that effect. Yet I hear the DPM admit to us now that it was not. And yet, his report from the Select Committee did say that the joints were very good.

So DPM, can you explain to us if it is – yes, it was good then or not, it was not good then, because your report said that it was good then. Thank you Madam Speaker.

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

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker for the opportunity to educate the Honourable Member. Every private company will tell you that the work that they do is the best. But the proof is in the pudding and that is when you test and do the quality assurance. You just do not take their words for it, you make sure. Which is something that a good Government will do. As a good Government we found that there were faults in the work that they carried out. Not so much faults that the work was not up to the standard required. And like the good Government we are, we undertook to remedy that. And even a better Government, we remedied it at no extra cost to our people.

And we are following due process as I mentioned before Madam Speaker, for arbitration to recover some of those costs. And that process will follow its due course according to the law. If the Honourable Member is pleased with the response which is very clear and straightforward on every project that we carried out. There is contract to do the work to a certain standard. There is quality assurance done independently to make sure the work was up to standard. And if it was not, then remedies will apply to ensure that it is brought to the standard. And that is what we have done Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you as our time is running out, I see the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera.

MR T. TUAVERA: I am not quite happy with the answer that the DPM gave. He did ask if I was happy but I am not happy with the answer he gave because now I would say those workers came into this Honourable House and did not tell us the truth. Because his report said everything was fine. So, my question here is this and also on the word remedial. Thirteen million dollars is not a remedial job Madam Speaker.

With millions of dollars spent Madam Speaker, we cannot say this is a remedial and everything is fine when it is not. So, Deputy Prime Minister I think the answer you gave is not very good and we are running out of time and I will save my next question for tomorrow. Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I see the Honourable Minister of Health.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question the Member for Akaoa raised last week. We had a sit down session to answer his query and we have agreed that it will be an agreement between him and me, and not to be brought back to this House.

I am doing this, so it will be recorded in our report and it will be permanent, that a response from me was made to the Member.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Members that completes our Question Time. We will go to the Orders of the Day.

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker if I can just intervene at this stage. There is an unresolved matter before the House and that was in my explanation.

MADAM SPEAKER: On 377?

HON. H. PUNA: Yes, under 377. Because I think before you can consider the complaint then, there has to be a resolution first from the Members of the House, if they support the resolution. Then that obliges you to look at the remedy that needs to be applied, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: So, Mr Prime Minister the best way would be to put a Motion then?

HON. H. PUNA: That would appear to be the way to handle this matter, thank you Madam Speaker. Under Standing Order 377 (2), that seems to be the process.

MADAM SPEAKER: So, would like to move that Motion?

HON. H. PUNA: Well Madam Speaker I think I will move:

That in light of the incorrect reporting in the Cook Islands news last Friday, that this Honourable House takes appropriate measure to show its displeasure and objection to the article, but that you as Speaker be given the authority under Standing Order 377 (2) to take appropriate action

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Is there a Seconder for the Motion?

I see the Honourable Terepai Maoate.

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Madam Speaker. I stand to support the Motion by the Prime Minister and may I speak.

Seconded by the Honourable Terepai Maoate

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes and do you want to speak as well. Very briefly please.

MR T. MAOATE: Yes, Madam Speaker very briefly. In acknowledgment to the Member of Parliament for Mauke, thank you for raising this issue to this Honourable House and the clarification by the Prime Minister of this defamation issue.

As the Prime Minister said earlier, it is actually the credibility of the newspaper that is at hand. For that matter, all newspaper and media as we have seen on the media we cannot get any control or take charge of that.

But Madam Speaker, I am definitely giving you the authority to really come down strong on these media reporters. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Because it is quite a long Motion, I want to make sure and that you agree it is what the Motion is about. So, I am just going to wait for the Motion from the Prime Minister and read it for you, as I put the Question on your vote and just give us a bit of time.

HON. H. PUNA: Can I ask that we defer this matter for now until towards the end of today's Sitting.

MADAM SPEAKER: We can do that and that was what I was going to do because it is going to be a substantial Motion in order for us to act on it appropriately.

HON. H. PUNA: That will be nice thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Alright, so we can defer it to later in the day. So, I will not put a vote to that Motion yet, until we have it written out and we will go through it later. Thank you.

I would like to recognise our guests in our public gallery today. We will now go to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Orders of the Day, is on the Appropriation Bill 2020. When we adjourned on Friday, it was on the Interrupted Debate on the Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2020.

I will propose the Question:

That the Bill be now read a Second time?

As the Prime Minister was the Seconder of the Motion, do you wish to continue or we open it up for discussion?

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker, I have indicated when I seconded the Motion that my speaking slot be reserved for later.

MADAM SPEAKER: Alright and we open the Floor to a Member of Parliament to debate for 20 minutes and your debate will be on the financial and economic state of the Cook Islands and the Governments financial policy on the Appropriation Bill 2020. And may I remind you, that you will only speak for one time, should you need extra time a Member will have to move for your extra 10 minutes and that will be your one debate for this time on the Bill.

I give the Floor to the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker if I may take a moment to give my words of condolences and comfort to Papa Tiki Matapo who has lost his dear wife. May you, your household and your whole family be comforted. Even though I rise to speak as the Member of Parliament for Matavera, however I extend all the sentiment on behalf of all the Members of the Opposition.

Secondly, Madam Speaker I would like to make mention about one of your staff member who is currently in hospital, Kimiora Vogel who underwent surgery last week. May God give you the strength. So, to you sister, take care and all the best. My greetings also goes out to the village and the people of Matavera. I also acknowledge and greet our two friends in the public gallery this afternoon, greetings.

Madam Speaker, I would like to talk about the report presented to us last week by the Deputy Prime Minister regarding our financial situation. I would like to thank the Minister Vaine Mokoroa today. The Member for Ngatangia and I wanted to go and listen to the Budget presentation by the Deputy Prime Minister at the Islander Hotel. Fortunately, he arrived at my doorstep at 6.30 in the morning, and we arrived at the Islander at about 6.45 a.m.

Our intention was to go and pay our own breakfast but when the Minister saw us, he said, “Don’t worry, I will handle this”, so thank you Minister.

Now, I would like to come back to the financial report delivered by the Deputy Prime Minister. When I look at the summary of the Appropriation because the main thrust as we look at this Budget is, to help our people. When I look at some of the policies that he set for 2021, there are avenues that he has laid out to help us with this Appropriation.

How do we access the funds from the areas that has been already appropriated? Do we strengthen this Appropriation today? They have set this as the medium term budget. Madam Speaker, I would also like to give my thanks to those that have put his Budget together. The reason I say this is because these are our young people that did this very good job. I would say that the knowledge they have to put this together, we should praise them for doing this.

Madam Speaker, I would like to dwell on the area called Policy Elements. This mentions the assistance to be given to the local businesses in the Cook Islands. How we support in this area is the stimulus in the Cook Islands and the areas of concern with our people. I see one area they have considered in this Appropriation under the heading of Economic Response Plan as well as the Medical Response Fund. This will serve to strengthen our Ministry of Health.

This will also serve to assist our work on our roads and drainages. Madam Speaker, let me dwell on the subject we discussed last year, 2019/2020 Budget on the increase remuneration for workers. We all know when we entered into the environment of the COVID-19, although this virus did not enter our country. Under this Appropriation it stipulates that we are not cutting this but we are deferring it to a time when we are able to afford this.

Madam Speaker, I bring my thoughts to this area called Economic Response Plan. Under the area of assistance from businesses to sole traders. As well as to support and strengthen our situation here in the country. Also they have considered how do we improve the investments in this country and they have put this under 3 main headings for us to consider.

First of all, under Supporting Livelihoods Immediately, and second under Recovery under the times we are entering in and thirdly the transition into Smarter Economy, because they have estimated that it will reach up to \$76 million for this Response Plan. The funds to be appropriated under this will be \$64 million, and under this as I have stipulated, all these funds will go to support those areas I have mentioned.

Madam Speaker, let me return to the area of net debt rule. Under this, it stipulates what to do so that we do not exceed the ceiling that we have set because it has been stipulated

that we cannot exceed the 30 percent, and when it becomes heavier let us not exceed 35 percent. Therefore, we need to consider and plan to strengthen this area under the GDP.

The funds have been allocated under the Economic Response Plan for the sum of \$64 million appropriated to strengthen our country today. On top of this Madam Speaker, there is a provision to look for an extra \$16.5 million, under this area. I believe this has been allocated by our young people for this area.

Madam Speaker, I return to the area of revenue for the country and under the provision, they have established operating revenue. We can see the revenue from the years 2018 and 2019 and as we can see, Madam Speaker as we go through this time there is a drop in the 2020/21 revenue. But, Madam Speaker when we read through this Appropriation Bill we will understand why there is a drop in revenue.

I want to assure all of us, that when this Appropriation Book landed in my hands last Friday, I want to confirm to us that I read it from the beginning to the end and from the end to the beginning. So Madam Speaker, when you look at my book, it has all sorts of colours. That is why I have said I have read this book from the beginning to the end and back to the beginning. That is the only way to understand the Budget Appropriation for today.

Madam Speaker, I will come back to the area of Capital Expenditure. Madam Speaker, before us is the Capital Expenditure from 2018 to 2020. Madam Speaker, my intention is to make sure our people understand this appropriation under capital because when we look at the figures, there is an increase and there is a reason for the increase, Madam Speaker. We all know, this expenditure has been expended to assist the country during this time.

When we look at the Appropriation for 2019/20, it is around \$188,959,000 million and when we look at it now, it has increased up to \$231 million. This establishes the foundation from where we began until where we are today.

Madam Speaker, when I look at the area for the purpose of strengthening the Outer Islands, because the Government has confirmed to us that the minimum wage will increase to \$8 as of the 1st July. This confirms to me that there will not be a decrease for our Pa Enea. This gives them assurance that what they receive, they will also receive an increase.

When we look under Capital Expenditure from 2019 to 2020, it amounts to about \$60 million. Under the Appropriation 2020/21 this has increased to \$80 million. It has been explained to us the reason for this increase.

As we can see this appropriation has been allocated to improve the area of water, sanitation as well as roads and bridges on Rarotonga and the Outer Islands. During times of emergencies like cyclones, appropriation has been made for this.

There is as well a provision for IT Network. We have discussed this in the House Madam Speaker, how to strengthen this to help our people and to improve their situation.

Madam Speaker, I have read a letter to the Editor in the newspaper and this letter dwell on what the Deputy Prime Minister have said. The letter mentioned about the Deputy Prime Minister's statement last year. Maybe the Deputy Prime Minister should take time to put the record right relating to what was said as we saw today. What they have said is that there are advantages and disadvantages.

Madam Speaker, when I sum the whole thing, I find that this Appropriation is to help our people. Even though there is a decrease in the revenue, however expenditure is still an increase and I see this helping our people. Also Madam Speaker, I could see that they have provided proposals, initiatives to help our people in the future.

One area in this is, when the tourist returns back to our country and the estimates provided by our young people in the next few months, maybe we will be looking at three to four thousand arrivals but we should all be mindful that these are just predictions. I would estimate that through September to December, we will reach arrivals of two to three thousand.

However, Madam Speaker we are still planning even though we are not sure what will happen. This report also stipulates as we sit here, the planning in case we encounter more problems.

Madam Speaker, I return to the Schedule under this Appropriation for the debts that was taken out from 2019/20 and we look at the expenditure.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera.

MR T. TUAVERA: Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Honourable Member's speaking time be extended

MADAM SPEAKER: It is your ten minutes. Is there a Seconder for the Motion?

Secinded by the Honourable Tingika Elikana

I put the Question:

That the Motion for the extension of ten minutes be granted to the Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa?

Motion agreed to

You may continue Honourable Member.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Member for Ngatangiaa for proposing and supported by the Member Tingika Elikana.

Madam Speaker that is why I said that if we plan everything, it will work for us.

I will come back to the term of re-appropriation 2019-2020. When you compare this to this year 2020/2021, there is not much difference Madam Speaker. Even though there is a slight decrease, there is not much difference. Then it confirms the strength of our financial situation from last year to now.

We heard the Deputy Prime Minister say that there is already an appropriation under a Reserve Fund and today, we are utilising part of this fund for Appropriation today.

Madam Speaker, as I have said before, I have gone through the Budget and I am confirming that this Appropriation will help us today.

We also heard talk out there that this is a good Budget or is a tough Budget but I will leave that to the Deputy Prime Minister to clarify when he presents.

Madam Speaker, I would like to commend this Budget because I know this is to help our people, nothing else but to help our people. I do believe the Deputy Prime Minister is asking us to consider this carefully as we look how to improve this.

Madam Speaker, I have also looked through Book No.2. I liken this to the Appropriation in Book 2 to year 2019/2020. Madam Speaker, there is not much difference in there. The allocations for Departments, there is not much difference and as well as the Outer Islands appropriation, there is not much difference. Do not anybody ask me, read your Book as I have said, I read it from beginning to end.

Madam Speaker, when you read through this Appropriation, you will know and understand what you need to speak on. But Madam Speaker, may I request when it comes to the Appropriation for the Ministry of Health, Madam Speaker I would like to touch upon the proposal last year where they were going to get an increment, I will propose that this should be increased. Because, Madam Speaker when we consider what they have done since the month of March until now, because Madam Speaker I have stayed in the Puna and I know how hard and the hard work they have done and how tired they have been.

Although it has been stipulated that the increments they were supposed to get will be, just holding position but I support that they should be looked at again. Maybe, Madam Speaker may I will request to the Minister of Finance to work with the Minister of Health to look at the workers in the Ministry of Health to receive their increment.

I would like to look at the allocation for Police. We all know last year it was proposed they receive their increments. Some have received their raise but some did not. Even though it was said that we should put this on hold but my plea to the Minister of Finance is, please reconsider this as we look at the tough times our Police are going through. My request is that we reconsider and to continue with the increment they were supposed to receive last year.

Madam Speaker, I have good feelings about the appropriation allocated to remunerate our Ui Ariki. I would like to thank the Minister for the House of Ariki and also the Minister of Finance. This is a good assistance to our Ui Ariki today because when we look at the allocation, there is a provision there to improve their lives today.

I will now come to the allocation for the Ministry of Infrastructure Cook Islands. I see a small increase in the allocation and I am requesting for more increase because, Madam Speaker when we consider the intent of this Budget, how do we support; to build all areas.

We see the work on bridges and I know that there is another couple of bridges remaining to be worked on. Madam Speaker, we have not gone through a storm yet but when it comes then we shall be ready. That is why, Madam Speaker I rise to give my thoughts on the allocation for ICI.

On top of that, Madam Speaker I refer to the area for Agriculture. Even though there is a small increase, I would like to ask for more increase. As we have discussed in this Honourable House during the time of the COVID pandemic, people are now planting. As well as in the Outer Islands and we have heard the Member from Amuri/Ureia saying the island is planting again.

That is why my request to the Minister of Finance working with the Minister for Agriculture is to review this and look at this area to strengthen for all our people. That is my request to increase the allocation for Agriculture and I know the Member from Mauke is also supporting this.

Lastly, Madam Speaker I refer to the Vote Item for Internal Affairs. I will not rest on the idea for the assistance to the aged and pensioners. I made a request in 2018, 2019 and this year 2020, I am making the same request. I do believe this is one area to support our pensioners on Rarotonga as well as the Outer Islands because we are still under the pandemic situation and how do we support our pensioners. This is the talk in our Puna, those who are vulnerable. I do know if we know what we are talking about, who are the vulnerable in our society.

To end my speech I would like to dwell on the Vote Item for Child Benefit. This is my request to review this maybe at the end of the year when our situation rises to look at child benefit, disable and as well pensioners. Madam Speaker, I thank you for the time allocated to me to speak.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. It is now time for our break and Parliament will suspend until 3.00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 2.28 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 3.00 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: Please be seated Honourable Members. Parliament is resumed.

I see the Honourable William Heather. You have the Floor.

MR W. HEATHER: Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to you Madam Speaker, to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, all Cabinet Ministers and all the Government Members. Kia Orana to our Leader and all the Members of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to this vote-buying Budget that is before this Honourable House. I say this with all sincerity and due respect to the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister before I continue to address my concerns and to explain to this Honourable House. Why I call this a vote-buying Budget. I would like to give credit where credit is due.

Thank you so much Honourable Deputy Prime Minister for blaming COVID-19 for our current economic shock and ill financial health. You have managed to deceive your fellow CIP party members and the Honourable Independent in your Government. But my taro patch common sense is not deceived by all your big fancy words and numbers because you and your Government alone are responsible for our country's financial depression by cutting off our life line.

From accessing millions of dollars in COVID-19 assistance given to developing nations by international financial institution. Honourable DPM...

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member there is a Point of Order on the Floor. Would you take your seat while I deal with the Point of Order, please?

What is your Point of Order?

HON. V. MOKOROA: Can the Honourable Member please tell this House, how did he know that Honourable Members, Honourable Ministers and all the Honourable Members on this side are deceived by this Government?

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member you have the Floor.

MR W. HEATHER: Madam Speaker, if you allow me to continue with my speech then the House will understand why I said this.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, you may continue and we will follow you as you speak.

MR W. HEATHER: Honourable DPM your raw ambition to engineer and push for our graduation.

HON. H. PUNA: Point of Order Madam Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER: What is your Point of Order?

HON. H. PUNA: Well the Honourable Member is saying that the Deputy Prime Minister as the Minister of Finance pushed for our graduation. I wonder if he knows what he is talking about and I would like to invite him to explain what he means by that.

MR W. HEATHER: I am talking about the situation of our country in economic development. I am saying through this our status has been raised to the economic status similar to New Zealand.

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker, it does not explain his comment whatsoever. All I can say is the Honourable Member does not understand how a country graduates and why. Perhaps he needs an education in graduation.

MR W. HEATHER: Thank you Prime Minister. When we look at what has happened on Rarotonga and Aitutaki then only these two islands should graduate. However, the remainder of the Outer Islands, Nga-Pu-Toru, Mangaia and the Northern Group to me, they are not ready for this situation. That is what I am talking about in this situation of graduation. But anyway I will move forward.

HON. M. BROWN: Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: What is your Point of Order?

HON. M. BROWN: The Point of Order Madam Speaker is the Member is misleading this House by stating that I am responsible for the graduation of this country and that I petition and it is incorrect Madam Speaker and I would ask the Honourable Member to withdraw his statement.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member, are you prepared to withdraw your statement.

MR W. HEATHER: Madam Speaker, I will withdraw my comments but I will seek further information and clarification and I will bring it back into the House.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and you may continue.

MR W. HEATHER: Anyway, the Government had all its eggs in one basket.

MR T. ELIKANA: Point of Order.

MADAM SPEAKER: What is your Point of Order?

MR T. ELIKANA: Madam Speaker, I think Standing Order 159 is very clear that we should not be reading from our notes because it appears my learned friend is reading from notes. He can use it to refresh his memory but not to read from those prepared notes.

MADAM SPEAKER: That is true, there is a Standing Order that says that we must not read but you can refer to your notes to remember what you want to talk about.

Do you have a Point of Order?

MRS S. NAPA: I just like to put it to the Table that there are so many Point of Orders from that side in regards to the speech and especially the Honourable Tingika Elikana. He made a Point of Order for a Maiden Speech last year for reading and some of them read their speeches too.

MADAM SPEAKER: A Point of Order takes precedent in Parliament. Any Member can make a Point of Order at any time and it is supposed to be dealt with when it is

brought. It would help if you make your debate, just take account of 159 so that you do not have a Point of Order put against you.

Honourable Member you may continue.

MR W. HEATHER: Madam Speaker, never mind I will listen to the Honourable Member Tingika Elikana. We can see the situation Madam Speaker that the AID funding that we have been receiving have been cut. That is the reason I raised this matter because to me it was unfortunate that now we do not receive AID funding today. The DPM in his speech said that his Government is responsible for the unprecedented economic growth because of tourism for the last 10 years.

We may ask Madam Speaker, if only a 5-star resort hotel is built on Rarotonga then I would agree with what he said. However, Madam Speaker there is no strategy to tell us the move forward Madam Speaker. That is why Madam Speaker I am stating that we are not capable, not resourceful and not innovative enough to move this area forward. I am not talking about us but speaking about the Government. This is what has been happening Madam Speaker but when we look at the areas of transforming our economy this requires to be implemented, monitored and audited.

The audit should stipulate what is our situation with our finances; what has been spent and what is left and what we have for the future. When we look at Budget Book 2 under Business Plan, there is nothing in there by way of grants for assistance to the people. When we look at the Government Ministries, the policies look good. However, the finance to push everything forward, is not there. We may ask, where have these funds gone to?

Because these have not been audited, the Government financial accounts have not been audited. Within our Constitution Madam Speaker article 71 (2), it says, that the Cook Islands Government account shall be audited and presented in Parliament annually.

I hear the comments made by the Honourable Elikana a few days ago when he said the word “shall” mean “not optional” but in English it means compulsory. Madam Speaker if we look on page 13, Book 2, the Audit office has been complacent in complying with the Constitution duty of auditing. That is why my concern is of the Governments account have not been audited then how can we pass law for a Budget appropriation today.

Maybe this has been created on face value or maybe it only estimates or maybe these are dreams. Madam Speaker we require what is right and audited accounts every year. This should give us the confirmation of what we are to believe and to ensure that the business we are conducting is proper. To build our country back up from the COVID-19 situation.

When I consider the Vote Item under agriculture that the Deputy Prime Minister was mentioning about aqua-tech. And yet at the end no eggs were laid, no funding. Then how can our intent to move agriculture forward be realised? If there is no subsidies and no low interest loans to farmers, then how can this area be developed.

Madam Speaker, I would suggest that if we saw something like \$5 million allocated to process our food crops like taro, tarotarua and kumara into 2 or 5 kilogram bags to be exported to New Zealand. Madam Speaker, I am sure that is when we will see there is an area to improve agriculture. This, there is nothing and when we look at the Northern Group we will see what we will get from the Northern Group. We know that there is fish in the Northern Group but I am telling this House that we can get coconuts and also coconut oil and oil from the Pacific Mahogany tree as a benefit for our lives.

We can see also in the plan that I am talking about our people will benefit, they will get employment as well as to encourage our people to return to agriculture and not depend on hand outs.

We can also see the benefit of working on your farm and it will reduce NCD and also we can see that there will be an increase in GDP. Madam Speaker, those are my comments for now and maybe later I will complete my thoughts. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. Are there any further speakers? If there are no further speakers, I see the Honourable Prime Minister. You have the Floor.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker, thank you to the staff of this House and thank you to all Members of this House and those who are listening to our radio. My thoughts also extend to my people in Manihiki, to the Mayor and Island Council and all the people of Manihiki.

Again, I extend words of comfort to Papa Tiki Matapo for the passing away of his wife, to the children and all the family. It is so comforting to be at the airport to welcome the family, to go to the Church on Saturday and even at home where the family Service was run and to see all the family. But the greatest comfort for us that we had the ability to return the body of Aunty Mii back home.

Also words of comfort to the Manihiki family for the passing away of their loved one yesterday and our Member of Parliament from Matavera is also included in this as we remember Papa Honu Ben. I do believe that his body will be returned this Friday.

This is comforting news that I want to mention for our people in Manihiki because at the front page of Cook Islands News today, a mention of our son Matthew Johnson. He has survived without us believing he will, because he had a big heart operation and he was in a coma for a while and we never thought that he will survive.

Finally, we would like to thank God for providing for this boy to recover and he walked out of hospital on his own, so we thank God for this miracle.

Madam Speaker, I was not going to speak now but listening to the Member for Ruaau, has pushed me to stand up and explain some things to this House. The problem is he is reading something that was written by someone else and not his own thoughts. I know who the European is who wrote it.

I am surprised even those listening in to say that, this is not mentioning about the Cook Islands trying to find excuses that will put the blame on our country.

He commented about graduation. This is very surprising. It is not us seeking for this. We have reached this position by our record, by our history in building up our Nation. This is nothing to be embarrassed about. It seems that the Minister thinks we should stay as we were and keep begging to the world. What do you think of this, where is our pride? The hard work of our people is being ignored. This is not just the Government, we were all in this together. This is the proof of the hard work of our people in looking to develop and improve our National economy.

This is the law of this world. This Organisation called the OECD are the ones that decide, Cook Islands yes you have improved for so many years, you have reached the threshold to graduate to a developed country. I do not see anywhere we should not be proud. It is as though the Government is being blamed that we are wrong and our situation has been good. This is absolutely ridiculous.

We are being blamed that we put all our eggs in one basket which is tourism. Why not, we did a fantastic job with it and that is why our situation improved. Maybe we do not know but in the statistics we have 698 holiday homes here in Rarotonga. That is why we have so many visitors to our country. Why should we bother that we do not have a five-star hotel and that means funds will go overseas? These 698 operations are Cook Islanders here on Rarotonga. They invested in maintaining and built new facilities so they can tap into this benefit of tourism. They deserve our praise for having the courage to be part of this industry and yet, this colleague is saying we should be embarrassed because we have graduated. I really do not understand this train of thought, Madam Speaker.

We should be proud of them. We on this side of the House are absolutely proud of them and that's why we have gone out of our way to make sure that these businesses, these homes survive. That is why there was provision in assisting them in their loan repayments, so they can survive.

So I am confused, I thought we should be proud that we were able to care for each other because that is what this Budget is seeking to do. This virus happened, everything closed down, the Government immediately launched Economic Response Plan 1.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, I see the Honourable Albert Nicholas. You have the Floor.

MR A. NICHOLAS: Madam Speaker, because I am enjoying the Prime Minister's speech, I am requesting that he gets an extension of his time.

MADAM SPEAKER: Would you move a Motion for the extension of the Prime Minister's time for ten minutes please.

MR A. NICHOLAS: I rise to move:

That an extension of speaking time be given to the Prime Minister

MADAM SPEAKER: Is there a Seconder for the Motion?

Seconded by the Honourable Tingika Elikana

I put the Question:

**That the Motion for the extension of the Prime Minister's
time to ten minutes, be agreed to?**

Motion agreed to

You may continue.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you, Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of this House. But our government were swift in providing the assistance to our people. We all know the types of assistance provided. Assistance to businesses, helping our unemployed, the pensioners and all. To me we were able to do that because we had the means to do that. It comes back to financial management of this country.

Therefore, I would like to commend our young people working in the Ministry of Finance and the Minister for Finance for managing the finances of this country so well that allowed us to respond quickly to the downturn in our economy.

I am wondering where are all the businesses that reap the benefit during the profitable years, because to me, if the Government benefitted then everybody else benefitted. Never mind this is the area for Government because we all agree we are the parents of the country. So we did not wait in providing our responsibility as a parent.

The heart-warming part of this Budget is, we extending the stimulus Economy Response Plan to No.2 Stage. I would say that within these two response plans, there is about \$140 million allocated by Government. So we should congratulate our people because this is the result of their hard work. All the Government did was manage it and guide the expenditure of our country.

I am not certain, Madam Speaker if we all know Members of Parliament and our people listening in, that we are the first country that graduated to economic development status in the Pacific – no, the help through the Economic Response Plan.

The Prime Minister of Australia stated that he was happy with what we are doing with our country. Even though the actual amounts cannot be compared to what they have in Australia, however he was happy with the intent. So, Honourable Members we have every reason to be proud of our Budget.

I am not saying this is the Budget for Government but I am saying this is for all of us. It reflects the truth that we have all pulled together over the last six, seven years to grow our economy and we are now in a place where we need to call on that money to help us.

I am worried when I say that I am leaving this boat and I am departing because I am certain that over the last few years that we have worked together, my friends are ready. They are ready to steer and guide our ship for the country. When we look, we have a number of youth in our House today, not just on our side but right around the House.

This is the responsibility for those of us who have been in the House and maybe have grown grey hairs that, it is time to pass the baton to the younger generation. Therefore, I have no problem that I am leaving this ship as it is in good hands. And if this intention is I do not have any good luck in Fiji, then Papa Henry will sit at the back.

Madam Speaker, those are all my thoughts on the matter before us, just to correct and clarify some of the statements from the Member and just to remind our people of things that are appropriate for them to be reminded of. To me even the challenges of COVID-19, this country is in a good place right now and it will continue to be in a good place into the future. That is up to us to find new avenues because we cannot go back to business as usual. There is a new norm that we must adapt to and we must accept and I have faith in our generations that are coming on, to seize those initiatives to take us forward. May our God grant us wisdom and knowledge as we guide our ship forward for the sake of our people. Kia Orana e Kia Manuia. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Prime Minister. Are there any further speakers? If there are no further speakers, I will move. We have two speakers, ladies first. I will call the Honourable Tina Browne; you have the Floor.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Perhaps I could defer to the Honourable Member Nooroa Baker. I do prefer to speak last on this side, so I am happy to allow Mr Baker to have the Floor.

MADAM SPEAKER: Certainly. I give the Floor to the Honourable Nooroa Baker.

MR N. BAKER: Thank you Madam Speaker. If I may have the opportunity to speak about some people before I return to the Budget. I thank the Prime Minister and his Deputy Prime Minister and all your Members of Government.

I also extend my greetings to our Leader and all our Honourable Members. I also extend my special greeting to all the people in my constituency of Akaoa and thank you for your support for me and putting your trust in me to represent you in this House. And I extend my condolences to Papa Tiki Matapo and family as you all go through this time of dark cloud. May God comfort you all during this time.

I will now return to the Appropriation before the House. Yesterday I went to visit someone that used to work for the government of New Zealand. I took with me my Budget books for him to look at. You all know my full time work is cutting and trimming trees. Sometimes I do not understand what is in the Budget book but I go and search for some knowledge and understanding.

So, I met up this friend of mine yesterday because in my life I have friends who holds high positions. And this is what he explained to me, I will not stand here to criticise but I want to share with you as to what he explained to me that is contained in these books. This is the key word he gave me because we have come through this COVID-19 lockdown situation. Not just us here in the Cook Islands but the whole world. This is what he advised me; it is not good for us to dispute of this book. But we should find ways not to lay blames. He said our Appropriation for the coming year when we have the money then we can improve all the systems of Government.

His advice to me – just go with it for now. Then we look at the next Budget. So, I will not be talking much on this Book because that is the advice I was given by an official that used to assist the government of New Zealand. So, my pleas to the Honourable Members of this House is, not to blame and criticise but we should work together in particular during these hard times. We work for our people and for our Nation. Our DPM, Minister of Finance have said that we should go and borrow some money. Because the whole world is in this, so we cannot get out of it.

That is why I am saying in this House, we should be working together for the benefit of our people and country. We have to find ways and I hope that this message I am putting across the Floor that we will all understand. May God help us all in these hard times. Thank you.

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

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to you and your staff this afternoon. To all Honourable Members in the House, our people listening in on the radio, livestream and the media, Kia Orana.

Special greetings to my constituency of Amuri-Ureia. To all the different appointed positions among the village, the churches, the business sector and our people from the old to the little children, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord.

There is an election before us and to those who are contesting in this election, I encourage you and wish you the best in this election for Mayor and Island Councillors. My humble request to you is, let us go through this peacefully and let us not fight among ourselves.

Now, I would like to express my condolences to Papa Tiki Matapo and the family and on behalf of our people from Aitutaki I convey our prayers and comfort.

I would like to come back on the Bill before the House. The financial statement by the DPM and the Appropriation estimate in both books plus the business plan looks to be a very flash beautiful financial documents. The Phase 1 of the ERP takes place in our Supplementary Amendment of March 2020 we have to give credit to the Government and the finance.

There were some hitches getting the funds out to our people and I think this is more towards the Pa Enuā. The messages that was delivered to us at the MPs workshop did not go according to what was delivered or explained to the Pa Enuā. Sometimes it took a couple of months before the applicants were able to get access to the funds. Up to last week, my understanding was, there are still some with shortfalls. This is not a complaint, this is to try and medicate the shortfalls that we are going to go forward with this ERP Phase II.

This Budget the statement has some good merits and principles in it. Do not get me wrong, we want to support the ERP Phase II. However, some parts of it I think can be called a wish list because, there is no coherent plan activities and actions in some of the business plans.

The economic forecast in the Appropriation Estimate and Business Plan I feel is too optimistic. Let me explain to this Honourable House what I mean. Phase 1 Forecast in March 2020 was based on a short COVID pandemic. The Budget 2020 we are looking at and the forecast I feel that it is based on a tourism economy turning around too early.

New Zealand and Australia have not considered opening up their people to travel to the Cook Islands as tourists. According to Book 1 of the Appropriation Estimate and the Ministry's Business Plan, there is quite a big jump of the GDP from 2021 to 2022. However, I do not see any clear explanation in the Financial Statement or the business how this will be achieved. If it is tourism, I think we are pushing it too fast to rely on tourism. Maybe we are not actually preparing this Budget for the worst case scenario.

Agriculture as we see in the Appropriation Book has a very, very low GDP. We have talked about the agriculture turning into an alternative revenue for the Government. When we look at the Budget from increase of between the amendment and 2020, this Budget, there is only a \$100 thousand increase to boost this economic forecast just in agriculture.

We have been sitting in with the Ministry of Finance and they have indicated there is one million dollars from the ERP that will go towards the agriculture sector. I do not see how we can move forward with one million dollars on providing equipment, providing support to develop especially the export area. One million out of \$64 million for the ERP, I think we are actually on a wish list, wishful thinking that it is going to happen in agriculture.

The Smart Agri-tech in the statement is beautiful, that is where the new initiatives and productivity where the support will go to. However, when I look at the Business Plan Book 1, there is nothing in there that actually states that, not even on new initiative Smart Agri-tech.

When I go into Book 2 there is nothing there under Agriculture or even the Finance. So I am concerned maybe these two departments did not actually sit down and do the planning to make a statement that there is one million dollars but it is not showing in the Agriculture Appropriation.

We would like to support the Economic Response Plan but I truly believe there should be funding appropriated towards that so that they know what they are actually doing or spending without having to walk in the dark.

My recommendation is that we should look at the tourism as what it is today, nothing, zero. We should be considering the turnaround of tourism. New Zealand might get another COVID a third wave and we can prepare our Budget accordingly towards the alternative like agriculture, which will take a shorter, a confirmed exercise that we, unless there is a cyclone, we can actually export this produce out of our country to New Zealand.

So in saying that, I would recommend the Minister of Finance to give the Minister of Agriculture \$10 million instead of one million dollars. This will enable the Ministry to

properly do their strategies and planning and action it, in a smart manner monitored by the MFEM.

I think it is time to finish off over here but before I do, I would like to say to the House that here is something as food for thought, for all of us. We are going through this recession and we should be prepared to go through for quite a while. We should all be prepared to take a pay cut. I believe some, if not all of us are actually putting it back into our communities or even on our islands but if we do it properly, voluntarily across the board whether it is ten percent or fifteen percent.

We both sides of the House have been talking about working together, our people will consider us a lot more responsible and hopefully the media will not carry on attacking me for being greedy and also of course all of us Honourable Members. But the overall important message that I would like to put across is, for us to lead the way and I would like to challenge them, all of those public servants with the same pay level as the MPs to follow suit. Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. I give the Floor to the Honourable Albert Nicholas.

MR A. NICHOLAS: Madam Speaker, your staff, Honourable Members on both sides of the House and our people listening in to the radio this late afternoon, good afternoon. To the people in my Constituency from Ruatonga to Atupa, and Avatiu, Kia Orana. To my family in Palmerston listening in to Parliament this afternoon, good day.

Madam Speaker, if I may just take a moment to just share my views on the Appropriation for this year. Trust me, Madam Speaker I would not need ten minutes, probably not even five as I would just like to focus on the uniqueness of this Appropriation 2020/2021. I would not dwell into the fine details of it but rather, just give us an overview and an expression of my true feelings for this Appropriation.

Madam Speaker, imbedded in this Appropriation is a programme which many have referred to as the Economic Response Plan or ERP. That Madam Speaker in my view, is precisely what makes this Appropriation so unique. It is so unique, Madam Speaker that Government today has become officially the sole employer of every single Cook Islander in this Nation. Through its ERP programme, Madam Speaker it has given financial support to businesses, employers and its employees. It has given financial support to the business itself.

It has given support to the unemployment sector that has slightly grown within this time and it is also moving into its Phase 2 of its programme, Madam Speaker which is to take leadership and responsibility of people's businesses such as holiday homes as the Honourable Prime Minister highlighted earlier which is to keep these businesses pretty much above water. As such when the time is right economically that these businesses will pretty much hit the ground running.

So unique is this Budget Appropriation, Madam Speaker that considering the issue that we have faced recently is not that hard to fail. I liken it like this, Madam Speaker it is like the issue of a man overboard.

We have two options, Madam Speaker whether to throw him a life raft or we throw him a concrete block. Such is the nature of the situation we are currently facing, Madam Speaker not just us it is a global issue. It is so global and so serious that it is unwarranted to point the finger at any one single person in this House. But how we face that issue, Madam Speaker and how we respond and act upon that issue, Madam Speaker is what in my view, Madam Speaker that defines our character.

I do not know how long we are going to be facing this current crisis and why I say that, Madam Speaker because, not long ago it seemed sure that we kind of like going to just get over it when New Zealand boasted on its current status of no Coronavirus issues for the last 24 or 25 days and all of a sudden they had two, three or four. But what does give me faith, Madam Speaker is the ability of our financial sector under the leadership of our Deputy Prime Minister, that they will do right by its people, Madam Speaker and guide us through these turbulent times.

Madam Speaker, it is normal reaction that in any current business situation, negative, it is normal practise to hoard finances and hold finances back because of fear of the economic situation. It takes character and courage Madam Speaker to push finance back into our economy during these hard times in order for our country and our economy to be able to have its head above the water and not to drown in the abysses of fear.

Madam Speaker, I cannot say enough about our team at MFEM. I have nothing but faith in their guidance and their financial wisdom to help us see this issue through.

As I promised Madam Speaker, I will not need ten minutes. Thank you very much.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much. My apologies Honourable Member Tina Browne, you actually had the Floor before the Honourable Member. Do you want to take the Floor now or would you like someone else?

Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera you have the Floor.

MR T. TUAVERA: There is a little bit of confusion on this side Madam Speaker of who is going to speak but I am not confused.

Kia Orana Madam Speaker and Kia Orana to all of us in this House today. Kia Orana to the Members on the Government side and also to our Members in the Opposition.

With your indulgence Madam Speaker, I would like to greet the people in my constituency. Kia Orana to all my people in Ngatangia as you listen to the debate in the House today.

Today, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister George Angene because today, some coconut trees were cut down at the valley in Turangi because on two occasions, one of my aunt's windscreen car was damaged by a falling coconut. I hope she is listening to the radio and aware that the coconut trees have been cut down.

Now, I would like to talk about the Appropriation Bill before us today. I am quite unhappy when I look at some areas in this budget Madam Speaker because it appears

to me, that there are only two industries that is being driven in this budget, which we call the main line. This is the tourism industry and as we know, it is no longer active today, and also as we discussed last week about another industry which we referred to as noodles, and that is the manganese nodule. We all know that the tourism industry has declined and for the nodules, we are still investigating and assessing it.

I have read this book like my friend here, and I have made some colourful marks in it. I wanted to read this so that I can understand this Appropriation Bill. I also referred to the Appropriation for the last financial year. My concern with the economic forecast in Book 1 is that it is very optimistic. It is not based on ground reality of COVID-19 and the possibility of reoccurrence because we know of countries like New Zealand, we were happy that the virus has disappeared but it reappeared again. We know the outcome of the cases in countries like China, Singapore and German.

Therefore, when I look at our Book 1, I am quite troubled because there is nothing in here relating to COVID-19. As they say in the Manganian language, there is no health data in here. What is in here is just the financial data. If you look at Book 1, page 27, it tells you exactly that. The data is all financial data. So the forwarding forecast in Chapter 5 could be so wrong or way off the mark, not concerning your name Honourable Member. That is the real concern I have because if the Bill is wrong, we as a country will sink down to where the nodules are.

I just want to elaborate on what I am talking about because I am looking at the area of Police. We agreed that New Zealand and Australia will not come into our country, so this puts us way back than it was forecast.

I was not surprise reading the comments in today's newspaper by the Task Force Chairman, Fletcher Melvin. He is entitled to his own views that there is no Plan B. Therefore, the country can be broke by September but I am hoping that our Honourable Mark Brown there can pull us out of that, so we will go straight to Plan C.

My concern is that if we are broke, there will be no more subsidy because in our community today, some people are starting to steal. Many of our people are also not reporting to their workplaces to make up 35 hours so that they can be paid \$320. To me, this is easy money and that is their attitude, it is easy money. They are supposed to do 35 hours to earn that money. There are many of them that are not doing that so this is one of my great concern with this ERP because it makes us lazy. That is going to create havoc in our law and order situation.

I am looking at the Vote Item for Police, from the last financial year to this financial year, there is only a small increase of \$100,000. I know that my colleague here said last time that the money was spent to pay some staff only in the Police Service and not all the staff.

MADAM SPEAKER: I see the Honourable Selina Napa.

MRS S. NAPA: Madam Speaker, just before I extend the speaking time for the Honourable Tama Tuavera, can we get a clarification on the time allocation of the debate? Is it 20 minutes or 10 minutes.

MADAM SPEAKER: Twenty minutes for this but you can have an extension if there is a Motion. But when we go into the Committee of Supply, then that is when the time allocation is put for each of the items.

MRS S. NAPA: Madam Speaker the Honourable Tuavera only had ten minutes speaking time instead of twenty.

MADAM SPEAKER: I beg your pardon, I did not realise that. You may take your extra ten minutes then to make it twenty minutes.

MR T. TUAVERA: Thank you Madam Speaker. The Members in Government did not complain, maybe they like my views.

Coming back to the Vote Item for the Police, you can imagine the result when they are already struggling to keep up with the rest of the island.

I would like to come back and talk about another industry. Last week, the Honourable Prime Minister was excited to announce the good income that we receive from the fishing industry. I believe it was around about \$20 million, and yet on page 43, figure 5/6, it shows that fishing contributed to our GDP is zero percentage. What I am looking at then is that the fishing industry is not helping our GDP.

During the Deputy Prime Minister's presentation, it mentioned about what is call aqua-tech. That is very good because it helps to diversify our economy, but is aqua-culture not included when we have resources and facilities sitting empty up north. I can see this as something beneficial to the people in the Northern Group Islands. We should not focus on the pearls only but also other resources such as clams, cat's eye and other sea food with the different variety of fish including tuna, milk fish and so on that can be farmed. This means we have to develop our marine resources to look into this and come up with something.

I remember in 2014 I spoke about this issue. The then Democratic Party Member, Albert Nicholas and I spoke about this issue and we agreed that this should happen in the Northern Group. We both raised this issue in this House during that time.

Madam Speaker, I have come to the end of what I want to say in this House. Before I sit down, I would like to commend Te Marae Ora, the management team of Te Marae Ora because they were responsible for protecting us so that this COVID-19 will not reach us. I will not forget our Puna in our villages and also those in the outer islands because they are volunteer workers.

So God bless all of them and all of us here today. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much and I see the Honourable Tetangi Matapo. If I can just say that you can talk until 4.50 p.m. because we have to finish the Motion before we close today but I will signal to you when we reach that time. When you come back in the afternoon you can be the first speaker.

MRS T. MATAPO: Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to all of us this afternoon in the Name of our Lord.

With your indulgence Madam Speaker, if I may greet the people in my constituency. But before I do that, I would like to thank the Minister of Health because today, Mangaia is very fortunate to have a doctor. Therefore, I would like to extend to you and the Secretary of Health and staff the appreciation from all the people of Mangaia. I also thank you all for supporting the request from Mangaia for a doctor. We also thank the doctor who agreed to be our doctor on the island of Mangaia.

I bring these words of appreciation from the people of Mangaia because earlier in the year, a meeting took place on the island and through me, I extend to you our sincere appreciation.

I would now like to give my regards to the people in my electorate Mangaia. To the three pillar on the island, the churches, the traditional leaders and also Government, Kia Orana. I am happy to see the spirit of cooperation amongst our people and helping one another in the area of planting, all the children and young people in the homes that helped with planting and also working on the taro patch. This is a good sign for us on the island of Mangaia because we do not often get tourists on our island.

I will now come back to the Appropriation Bill before the House. Firstly, I would like to thank Government for our Appropriation. When we look at our Books, we can see the great work that has been done and also the knowledge that has been given to put this together. I would also like to thank Government for the support during COVID-19. My colleague and I was not present during our last Sittings so we are unsure what were discussed. This is something that our people were concerned about when they heard about this virus, as they were unsure where they can get support from. I would like to thank Government for the assistance because our people were able to have bread and other necessities on the island.

In the Budget Statement delivered by the Deputy Prime Minister, he mentioned that the Economic Response Plan is the center piece of the Government 2020/21 budget for our economy to become smarter, greener and more resilient. Madam Speaker says that when you speak like this, it is flowery language. When you look at it, it is beautiful but when I put my glasses on and look at it carefully, it is somewhat different. However, that is your responsibility to put it together and to make it pleasing to the eye so we can praise your budget.

I think Madam Speaker my time is up, I can see it is now 4.50 p.m. and if you may, to give the rest of my speaking time tomorrow.

MADAM SPEAKER: Definitely tomorrow when we return at 1.00 p.m. you will be first on the Floor.

Honourable Members, we had a business earlier about the Motion that was put on the Floor, and before I can put a Question to the Motion, we have received a notice this afternoon in regards to this Motion. Since it was the Prime Minister that moved the Motion, I shall just allow him a bit of time to read that before we move on.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Honourable Members I acknowledge that there already is public interest out there on our discussions on this Motion that is

about to be moved. Naturally, Cook Islands News is saying their reporting was accurate and factual and I beg to differ.

I know they have been in discussions with the Opposition Office where a complaint from the Office was rightly laid with Cook Islands News. However, I am not privy to those communications but I just want to ask a simple question, when you look at the headline “MP’s Seek Allowance Top-ups in Downturn” what does that mean to each of us? It is really pointing the finger at all of us here in this House that we are seeking a top-up or an increase in our allowance.

Cook Islands News is saying no that is not what it means. Yes, I do not know whether they are addressing or who they are addressing these releases to. But we have a responsibility to ensure that the media is responsible in their reporting of our proceedings here in this House without sensationalising anything that they report, because that headline certainly achieved that.

So, Madam Speaker I want to move:

That this Honourable House resolve that the Cook Islands News headline an article in the front page of the paper last Friday, 19th June 2020 which published a report on the proceedings on Thursday, 18th June 2020 was inaccurate and unfair and further, that if the Honourable Speaker is also of the opinion that the report was inaccurate and unfair should order that the media representative that made the report, Rashneel Kumar, be ordered to withdraw from Parliament for a period to be determined by Madam Speaker

It is unfortunate but that is the wording of the Standing Orders because Madam Speaker you might be minded towards a lesser penalty but this is what the Order prescribes.

Perhaps there might be a response from the media that we are silencing the media. I certainly expect that from Cook Islands News but the reality is, all our proceedings in this House are being televised live and it is also being carried live on radio. So our people are not being denied the opportunity to tune in and to listen to what we are saying in this House. So we are not silencing the media, we are holding them to account and I certainly ask the Honourable Members of this House to support this resolution. Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister and that was already seconded by the Honourable Tingika Elikana – I beg your pardon it was seconded by the Honourable Tina Browne, it was correct?

I will begin that again. We have to stick with the first Motion that was put on the Floor. I beg your pardon, Honourable Terepai Maoate – it was seconded by the Honourable Terepai Maoate and to be sure I put the Question, I will read this Motion again.

It is very important that you vote according to what is written in this Motion:

That this Honourable House resolve that the Cook Islands News headline an article on the front page of the paper last Friday, dated 19th June 2020 which published the report of the proceedings

of Thursday, 18th June 2020 was inaccurate and unfair and further that if the Honourable Speaker is also of the opinion that the report on the 19th June 2020 was inaccurate and unfair shall order that the media representative that made the report Rashneel Kumar be ordered to withdraw from Parliament for a period to be determined by Madam Speaker

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members we are at the end of our Sitting for today and if I can ask somebody to say our closing Prayer please.

CLOSING PRAYER

MADAM SPEAKER: Parliament is adjourned until Tuesday 23 June at 1.00 p.m.

Sitting adjourned at 5.00 p.m.