



# FORTY-NINTH SESSION

## Hansard Report

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**FRIDAY 27<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2020**

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

### **OPENING PRAYER**

**MADAM SPEAKER (N. RATTLE):** Honourable Members, please be seated. Kia Orana to all Honourable Members who have entered this Honourable House this morning.

Before we begin the morning, I have a message from His Excellency the Queens Representative, Sir Tom Marsters.

It reads:

*Message to Parliament: Royal Recommendation signed by His Excellency the Queens Representative.*

*This is Message No. 5,*

*The Queens Representative in pursuant of Article 3 of the Constitution, on behalf of Her Majesty in pursuant of Article 43 of the Constitution recommends Parliament to proceed upon the Bill the short Title where is the Income Tax (Tax Credit for small short term accommodation providers) Amendment Act 2020,*

*DATED at RAROTONGA this 27<sup>th</sup> Day of November 2020.*

I lay this on the Table.

Honourable Members, there is not much to talk about today because we have a busy day, but I would like to bring something to your attention. When you arrived this morning, you would have found on your desks a tie for the gentleman and the ladies will take their ties for their partners. The ties are from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I guess we could say that is a Christmas gift to all the Members today.

Furthermore, you will find the white ribbon which I am very pleased to see you wearing in supporting the efforts of the Police, Internal Affairs and Punanga Tauturu and other organisations in our country in making sure that women, girls and children are safe in their homes.

As leaders of the country, the people will be looking for your support in ensuring that the activities of the ten days until the 10<sup>th</sup> December in making sure that the awareness is raised and the people are informed of protecting women, children and families.

I am pleased to say that the Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister George Angene and our ladies from the Opposition, the Honourable Member Agnes Armstrong, the Honourable Member Selina Napa and the Honourable Tetangi Matapo were out at the market to support this event on Wednesday.

Before I carry on, I would like to recognise our Solicitor General and our new staff, the Deputy Solicitor General who have joined us this morning – welcome. I also see a guest at the back. I am sorry my eyes are not so good I can't see, and I welcome you.

Lately, we have had a lot of families who have lost their loved ones. I sat down and wrote a list of names. It seems it would reach 20 or more in the last few months. So I will begin with the former Honourable Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Jim Marurai that we have gathered to say our farewell and meeting his family in having a closure of the event that was beautifully done at the Auditorium dome during the week.

Then I encompass every single family in our country or our people in New Zealand or Australia or elsewhere who have lost a loved one. I encompass them in extending our condolences, and God Bless you all.

To the people of the whole of the Cook Islands listening in by radio or watching by livestream today in this Sitting of Parliament, I greet you all in the Name of our Lord and Saviour.

Honourable Members, we have now come to our Question Time for half an hour and the Floor is open.

### QUESTION TIME

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I see the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera.

**MR T. TUAVERA:** Thank you Madam Speaker, since I am the first one to speak this morning, I would like to say Kia Orana to you and your hard working staff. Congratulations to the Prime Minister for your new post because I did not get to acknowledge you on the day. I know I missed you at the family meeting, so congratulations Prime Minister.

To all your new Cabinet Ministers, greetings. Greetings also to all the Honourable Members who are present in the House today, both on the Government side and our side in the Opposition – Kia Orana to all of you in the Name of our Lord.

Thank you again Madam Speaker. My question is to the Prime Minister. In the Cook Islands News dated 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020, you quoted, "*Our precautions are in step with what New Zealand does and goes up and down in relation to that alert system.*"

I understand this to mean that we do what New Zealand does. Therefore, New Zealand still maintains the 14 days quarantine for all Cook Islanders travelling to New Zealand. The question is, why have we lifted compulsory quarantine?

Thank you Madam Speaker.

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

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker, and thank you very much to the Honourable Member for the opportunity to respond, but also the opportunity to provide further clarification to our people listening in.

Normally, I do not believe anything that is written in the Cook Islands News without verification. Therefore, when Honourable Members say this is what they read in the Cook Islands News, I tend to look at it a bit with a grain of salt. But quite right the assessment of our border and the risks associated we look very, very closely at the situation in New Zealand and the reason is very simple, Madam Speaker, New Zealand is the only port of entry into our country via Auckland.

We have closed entry from Los Angeles, we have closed entry from French Polynesia, and we have closed any entry from Australia. Anybody who wants to come into our country must come through New Zealand, and of course the status of New Zealand at this stage is that it is at level one where there is no community transmission. We have to look back at the history of when this COVID started, Madam Speaker to March.

In March, we did not know much about this virus until now November, there has been a series of events that have occurred especially in New Zealand where both New Zealand and us have learned a lot more. Contrary to what the Honourable Member said, New Zealand does not tell us what to do. We have a very close working relationship with their Ministry of Health and our own Ministry of Health and our various Government Agencies that work in collaboration.

So in March when this virus first emerged, we closed our border and for three months, our people were stuck in quarantine in New Zealand. We started to understand the incubation period of this virus and worked out with New Zealand how we could return our people by housing them at the Edgewater Hotel for a two-week quarantine period.

During that time, New Zealand proved itself to be one of the world's foremost at how to contain this virus, how to manage it and how to eradicate it from within their community to the extent that when New Zealand was comfortable with their levels and they reduced it to level one, we allowed our returning Cook Islanders to come back during that period of May-June-July without having to go into quarantine because we were satisfied with the risk assessment that we could do that.

However, New Zealand had an outbreak in August Madam Speaker and immediately, we imposed the supervised quarantine again. New Zealand identified that its risk area was at the border where people coming into New Zealand, staying at these quarantine hotels posed the greatest risk of this virus escaping into the New Zealand community.

New Zealand went into lockdown again and they tested more extensively everybody associated with working at those quarantine hotels and working at the border and showed again how they could eradicate it within their community by moving to level one again during the month of October. We saw how well New Zealand learned from this when the next outbreak was in November. A worker with the quarantine hotel in Christchurch was infected. He infected one further person but because of the quarantine measures that were put in place and the widespread testing, it spread no further.

**MR T. TUAVERA:** Point of Order, Madam Speaker relevancy to the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Honourable Member.

**MR T. TUAVERA:** The question was, why have we lifted the 14 days compulsory quarantine. It is a simple question and he has not answered my question. He is just answering about what New Zealand does, and just to let him know this reference came direct from his Office.

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

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. It is a simple question but a very complex answer, and as I was just getting to the point Madam Speaker, we are in November now. The second case identified was a Defence Force worker in the Auckland hotels, again very quickly identified, contacts were secured and they reduced down to I think four people that were found to have been contaminated by him. With New Zealand confident that this had not spread to the community, they maintained their level at level one.

That Madam Speaker, coupled with more detailed information from New Zealand Health Authorities enabled us to make the decision that we did not need to impose the fourteen days quarantine period on our people because there was no risk of community transmission in New Zealand. We also felt confident Madam Speaker that every person who gets on the plane has been tested three days before departure, is assessed at the airport for any symptoms. We felt confident that with no community spread in New Zealand, the risk of anybody bringing it to our country was low enough for us to be able to lift the quarantine restrictions with confidence. Thank you Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, and I see the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa.

**MR V. TUPA:** My question is also to the Prime Minister regarding COVID-19. If you cannot give me an answer now perhaps you can give it at a later time. Since the start of this COVID-19, we set aside \$16 million for the COVID-19 Response Plan. The question is, how much has been spent out of this \$16 million and what is the balance? That is my question to you Prime Minister.

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

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker, and thank you very much to the Member for this question. I am sure our people would like to know how much money have been spent to help our people and what is the balance today.

I will be getting those figures more accurate for you Honourable Member, as they come to hand but I am very confident that our total package when we put it together was \$137,000,000 not just the ERP but totally the appropriated amounts. There was \$28 million in 2019/20 and then \$64 million as you pointed out for this financial year.

In addition, we also put directly into the Ministry of Health, \$8 million dollars to help boost and bolster their services but we have been very careful on the disbursement of these funds to support our people. To date to the month of October, we would have spent approximately over \$30 million. We still have the rest of this year to go, another month to the end of the year and another six months to the end of the financial year but because of the less than expected what we were going to pay out, we are able to extend the support that we have recently heard about for the wage subsidy by a further two months.

So even though we are in a good position, it is incredibly important that we start looking at new revenues coming back into our country. Thank you Madam Speaker.

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

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** Greetings to all of us this morning. Greetings to you Madam Speaker and all the staff of Parliament. To the Solicitor General and your Deputy, and also to the officer from the Tax Department, greetings.

Because we have been limited in our time for our Christmas greetings, I send to you all my Christmas greetings now.

To those listening on radio and watching on live stream, greetings to you all.

My question is to the Prime Minister, and I would like to ask this short and simple question like the question asked by the Honourable Member Tama. I believe the answer is yes or no.

When we started in this period of responding to this virus, we worked together and the leading objective was that, we are all in this together. If we remember, when we introduced the first COVID-19 Bill, it was an urgent business but we recognised that we need the Bill to be passed on the same day. Furthermore, all the amendments since that time, we in the Opposition supported them.

We believe that in the last few months, Government's decisions regarding the quarantine system, they followed the advise provided to them by the Ministry of Health and because we had faith in the advise provided by the Ministry of Health, we also supported this.

My question is, which I have also asked to two staff of the Ministry of Health and they were not able to answer it. When Cabinet made its decision to lift the quarantine, was that based on any advise at all from the Ministry of Health.

I would like us not to dwell on the comments, please just answer yes or no.

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

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. When I listen to this question it is almost like a lawyer in court.

Perhaps we need to explain the decision making process that the Government undertakes. As the elected Executive of this country, it is our job to make decisions. Government Departments and public servants are there to provide advise. That advise was taken on board and the Government then made its decision.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you. I see the Honourable William Heather, you have the Floor.

**MR W. HEATHER:** My question is to the Prime Minister. However, before I ask my question, I would like to take this opportunity to offer to him my congratulations for his new position as well as to the Deputy Prime Minister and to the new Minister, Patrick Arioka. I would also like to acknowledge the former Prime Minister, Honourable Henry Puna as well.

My question Honourable Prime Minister is, can you confirm the process adopted to recruit the new Public Service Commissioner as advertised in the Cook Islands Newspaper compliant with Article 73 of the Constitution and Section 5 paragraph 1 of the Public Service Act 2009.

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

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. I am a bit of a lost here. I do not really understand how else we can appoint a Public Service Commissioner other than under Article 73 of the Constitution. Unless the Opposition has another way of appointing a Public Service Commissioner like they have probably passed Public Service Commissioners ignoring open transparency and just putting in whom they want.

This Government Madam Speaker is committed to an open transparent process and we have cast the net far and wide to see who is the suitable candidate to apply for this very very senior statutory position within the Government. I am sure there will be some very good candidates that will apply for this, however, if the Opposition has some people in mind that they would like to appoint, please encourage them to apply. I understand the closing date has been extended, put your nomination forward.

I understand Madam Speaker that there is also a person to be nominated by the Opposition on the Selection Panel who will short list the candidates for the Public Service Commissioner. That should provide some very good comfort and assurance to our Members on the other side that the process will be undertaken in a very good transparent and fair manner.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I see the Honourable Tingika Elikana.

**MR T. ELIKANA:** Thank you Madam Speaker. My question is a very short question to the Member for Ruaau. You will remember in the Paper the release from the Member for Ruaau in regards to the appointment of the Police Commissioner. Subsequent to his release, he was corrected by the Secretary of Finance, Mr Garth Henderson as to the result of the application process resulting in the appointment of the former Police Commissioner, Patrick Tasker. By implication, with all due respect to the recently retired Commissioner of Police, the tapping on the shoulder of Mr Maara Tetava.

My simple question to the Member for Ruaau as spokesman for Police in the Opposition is, which process will you prefer, the open transparent invitation to anybody to apply or the one that the Democratic Government did when they shoulder tapped the recently retired Commissioner of Police.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I will allow you time to answer your question please Honourable Member. The question was asked to the Honourable William Heather.

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** I asked the Member if I can respond to that question because I was on the panel when the last Police Commissioner was appointed. So it was a transparent process.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Okay. Honourable Members I think if you look at your Standing Orders on questions. You are not really allowed; you are not to refer to newspaper articles because that is a business of the newspaper because you would be asked to substantiate what you are bringing to the Floor.

We have heard quite a few questions that was raised because of the newspaper, because of the newspaper, because of the newspaper. So you should really substantiate your questions according to what you know instead of just taking it from the newspaper. Look at your Standing Orders and learn them so we do not have to do that again.

That completes our Question Time. We will not go any further on questions because we have already gone over time, Honourable Members.

We will now go to Presentation of Bills.

## **PRESENTATION OF BILLS**

I ask the Leader of the House to make a Motion.

**MR T. ELIKANA:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker I stand to move:

**That Standing Order 224 relating to notice to be given of an introduction of a Bill or at least one day's notice be suspended to enable the introductions of the following Bills. The first one, the Income Tax (Tax credit for small short-term accommodation providers) Amendment Bill 2020. The second Bill, the COVID-19 Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2020. These Bill to be introduced into this House and passed through all its stages today**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I seek a Secunder for the Motion, please.

**Seconded by the Honourable Minister, Patrick Arioka**

I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to.**

We will now go to the Presentations of the Bills. I call the Minister Responsible to present the Bill.

**PRESENTATION OF BILLS**

**ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE (J. DANIEL):** Short Title: Income Tax (Tax credit for small short-term accommodation providers) Amendment Act 2020.

**BILL READ A FIRST TIME**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, and I ask the Minister to name the date and time of the Second Reading of the Bill.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Immediately after the COVID-19 Amendment Bill, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Second Reading of the Bill is ordered immediately after the COVID-19 Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2020.

I call the Minister Responsible to present the second Bill.

**ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE:** Short Title: COVID-19 Amendment Act (No. 2) 2020.

**BILL READ A FIRST TIME**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, and I ask the Minister to name the date and time of the Second Reading of the Bill.

**HON. R. TOKI-BROWN:** Forthwith Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The COVID-19 Amendment Act (No. 2) 2020 is called for a Second Reading forthwith.

Thank you very much we will now go to Presentation of Papers.

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS**



We have quite a number of Papers to present. So the Minister Responsible for all the Papers from 64 down to 77 will be presented by the Minister Responsible all in one go please. Then you can just present each one and then we will come back to the others.

Therefore, the first Paper is Paper 64.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker, I am honoured to present:

**Parliament Paper No. 64 – The Entry, Residence and Departure Award of Honorary Residence Order 2020 Serial No. 20/17**

Furthermore, Madam Speaker it is my pleasure to present:

**Parliament Papers No. 66, 67, 68, and 69. These are the Maritime Zone Exclusive Zones outer limits, the Territorial Sea outer limits and the Phase Lines of Territorial Sea Regulations**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Honourable Prime Minister, did you say 65 as well. I just heard you start from 66.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Sorry, 65, 66, 67, 68. I lay these before the House.

I now have the honour to present:

**Parliament Paper No. 69 and 70 – The Seabed Minerals Exploration Regulations and Seabed Minerals Exploration Fees Regulations**

I lay these before the House.

Madam Speaker, I have the pleasure to present:

**Parliament Paper No. 71, 72 and 73 – The Government of the Cook Islands Financial Statement for the years ended June 2015, June 2016 and June 2017**

I lay these before the House.

Madam Speaker, I have the pleasure to present:

**Parliament Paper No. 74 – The Police Appointment of the Deputy Commissioner Akatauirā Matapo Order 2020 Serial No. 20/24**

I lay this before the House.

Madam Speaker, I have the pleasure to present:

**Parliament Paper No. 75 – The Public Expenditure Review Committee and Audit for the appointment of Director Order 2020 Serial No. 20/25**

I lay this before the House.

Madam Speaker, I have the pleasure to present:

**Parliament Paper No. 77- The Customs Revenue and Border Protection  
Amendment Regulations 2020 Serial No. 20/26**

I lay this before the House.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you Prime Minister. I call the Minister Responsible for Paper 78, the Honourable Vaine Mokoroa.

**HON. V. MOKOROA:** Thank you Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present:

**Parliament Paper No. 78 – Welfare Benefits and Pensions Rates  
Order 2020 Serial No. 20/27**

I lay this before the House.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, and I call the Minister Responsible for Paper 79.

**HON. P. ARIOKA:** Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to present:

**The Progress Report of the Agriculture Bill 2020 Select Committee**

I now lay this on the Table.

Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 261, I stand to move:

**That the time allocated to the Agriculture Bill Select Committee  
to provide a Report by 23 December 2020 is extended for 6 months  
to allow the Crown Law Office and New Zealand Pacific Desk,  
Parliamentary Counsel Office to co-ordinate the final drafting of the  
Agriculture Bill 2020 Amendments approved by the Select Committee**

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

**Seconded by the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa**

I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I now call on Paper 80. The Honourable Tingika Elikana as the Chair of the Committee.

**MR T. ELIKANA:** Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to present:

**The Progress Report on the Crimes Bill 2019 Select Committee**

I now lay this on the Table.

Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 261, I stand to move:

**That the time allocated to the Crimes Bill Select Committee to provide a Report by 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020 be extended for six months to allow the Crown Law Office and the New Zealand Pacific Desk Parliamentary Council Office to co-ordinate the final drafting of the Crimes Bill 2019 Amendment approved by the Select Committee**

MADAM SPEAKER: I call a Secunder for the Motion.

**Secinded by the Honourable Vaine Mokoroa**

I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, and I call the Minister Responsible for Paper 81.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to present:

**The Progress Report of the To Tatou Vai Authority Bill Select Committee**

I now lay this on the Table.

Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 261 I stand to move:

**That the time allocated to the To Tatou Vai Select Committee to provide a Report by the 28<sup>th</sup> December 2020 is extended for six months to allow the Crown Law Office and the New Zealand Pacific Parliamentary Council Office to coordinate the final drafting of the To Tatou Vai Authority Bill with the amendments approved by the Select Committee and secondly to allow the Select Committee to undertake a second round of consultations in the Community and to complete its final Report**

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister, but could I just ask you to please correct the very beginning of that Motion. I think you read To Tatou Vai without Authority Bill Select Committee, if you could just correct that and that would be the whole Motion correct – in fact why don't you read that again please.

HON. M. BROWN: Read it again?

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes, please.

HON. M. BROWN: You are welcome. Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 261, I stand to move:

**That the time allocated to the To Tatou Vai Authority Bill Select Committee to provide a Report by the 28<sup>th</sup> December 2020 is extended for six months to firstly allow the Crown Law Office and the New Zealand Parliamentary Council Office to coordinate the final drafting of the To Tatou Vai Authority Bill 2020 amendments approved by the Select Committee and secondly to allow the Select Committee to undertake a second round of consultations in the community and complete its final Report**

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

**Secinded by the Honourable Selina Napa**

I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** We will now go to Orders of the Day and the Orders of the Day is the Second Reading of the Income Tax (Tax Credit for Small Short Term Accommodation Providers) – I beg your pardon we swap that, yes.

We will now go to the – that was on top of my list that's why. Thank you for putting me right. We will now go to COVID-19 Amendment Bill (No.2) 2020. I now call the Minister for the Second Reading of the Bill.

**HON. R. TOKI-BROWN:** Madam Speaker, I move:

**That the COVID-19 Amendment Bill (No.2) 2020 be read a Second time**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You may continue Honourable Minister.

**HON. R. TOKI-BROWN:** Greetings everyone in the Name of our Lord. Kia Orana to you Madam Speaker and all your Parliamentary staff, the Leader of our country and your Deputy, all Cabinet Ministers and Associate Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and all Members of Parliament, greetings to all of you.

I also wish to say Kia Orana to all our people listening to the radio and also those watching the livestream. To the three main pillars in our country, I give my warm greetings to you all. I also wish to give my condolences to all the families who have lost their loved ones recently. I cannot name all of you individually because there have been many, many families that have been affected during this time.

I also want to give special greetings to all the patients in our hospitals all over the Cook Islands, and above all, I wish to greet all the staff in the Ministry of Health from the Secretary to all your staff members. I greet you all and thank you for the work you are doing for our people.

A special mention to all our volunteers in the Puna for the hard work that you are doing in all the various districts around Rarotonga, I extend to you all special greetings.

I extend a special Kia Orana to my people of Enuamanu and also from the other Member of Enuamanu and as we are preparing ourselves for next week's meeting by Te Marae Moana. We believe that it will be an enjoyable time on Atiu.

A special greeting to the Solicitor General in the Public Gallery and your staff this morning. To all our Government Heads for the speedy work they have done and brought before us. Madam Speaker, as we proceed with the Bill before us this morning, Psalm 91 says, "*I have made Jehovah my refuge and a fortress in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence*". I truly believe Madam Speaker that this Psalm fits well with what we are about to discuss. May this guide us throughout the day and the future.

Madam Speaker, we do understand at the beginning of the year when we became aware of the COVID-19 virus situation. We know what this virus has done to the country since January up to today. We have the COVID-19 Act that was passed on the 29 March 2020 for our protection. The first amendment to that Act was passed on 30 April 2020. Madam Speaker and Members of the House, this is the second amendment to that Act and this was through the support of all the Members of Parliament. This second Amendment Bill will give support to the COVID-19 Act.

We will see the changes that will be amended in the Act and that is the extension of the duration of the COVID-19 Act to 31 July 2021. It also approves the Minister to prohibit or restrict any specified activity. The Minister can also require any person to comply with any conditions passed under the Act. This also extends to authorising the Minister requiring persons to stay physically distant from any persons in any specified way and the power given by the Minister subject to regulations in protecting our maritime border.

Madam Speaker, there are areas in the Principal Act that is contradictory to other enactments that had already been passed in the House. This Amendment Bill provides that if there is an inconsistency between the Regulations made under the Principal Act and any other enactments (except the Act or the Constitution), the Regulations prevails. Because some of our people are failing to comply with specified conditions, Section 23 of the Act has been amended to penalise those in breach of any Regulations made under the Act. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or a fine of not more than \$10,000. The spirit is to provide protection for our people.

This Amendment Bill also amends Section 31 of the COVID-19 Act to provide that air crew and crew of a vessel can be prohibited from entry into the Cook Islands unless in accordance with provisions under the COVID-19 Act. Two new Sections are inserted into the COVID-19 Act being Sections 32 and 33. Section 32 provides that Regulations may be made with respect to a number of different matters concerning the maritime border in particular to restricting entry of vessels into the Cook Islands; and imposing quarantine and isolation requirements for persons who enter the Cook Islands by sea. These are measures to prevent, limit or mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our country.

Madam Speaker, it is important for us to know there are no restrictions imposed on vessels on an innocent passage through our waters to a destination other than the Cook Islands. Under this new amendment, there are provisions that will cover any foreigner or foreign vessel entering the Cook Islands.

Madam Speaker, to all of us in this Honourable House, I offer to you my thanks for your support for this Bill since its existence. We all understand that the responsibility lies with all of us to ensure protection since this pandemic started. I offer my thanks to all those who have carried out their responsibilities in their various areas and in support for the protection of our country.

In conclusion, the Prophet Isaiah says, *“Those who wait upon Jehovah will have new strength they are liken to those upon the wings of an eagle, and they shall run and will not tire and they will never run out of breath”*.

Thank you very much Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you Honourable Minister, and just to keep things tidy, that was the Motion for the Second Reading of the Bill.

Can I ask for a Seconder for the Motion before we suspend?

**Seconded by the Honourable Prime Minister, Mark Brown**

Honourable Members, we will now suspend and return at 12.00 p.m.

**Parliament suspended at 11.00 a.m.**

**Parliament resumed at 12.01 p.m.**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, please be seated. Parliament is resumed. Where is the rest of our Members? Still coming.

Before we suspended, we had just seconded the Motion on the Second Reading of the Bill.

I will now propose the Question:

**The Motion be agreed to?**

The Floor is open to anyone to debate. I see the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa and you have the Floor.

Honourable Member just give me a minute please. That is fine, you may continue.

**MR V. TUPA:** First of all, Madam Speaker greetings to you at this time as we approach the afternoon. Madam Speaker, first, I wish to convey a couple of acknowledgment to a few Members in the House today.

First of all, I convey my congratulations to our new Prime Minister. May God grant you good fortune, to you, your wife and your family and all the staff under your Prime Ministership.

My second acknowledgement is to our former Prime Minister, Honourable Henry Puna. I convey my appreciation and greetings to him, his wife and his children and wish them well. Only he understands the reason behind his resignation as Prime Minister.

My third acknowledgement in conveying my congratulations is to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Robert Tapaitau. I greet you Deputy Prime Minister, your good wife, your children and family. In particular, your mother who resides in my village of Matavera – congratulations to you.

My fourth acknowledgment and congratulations goes to our new Minister, Honourable Patrick Arioka, your good wife, your children and constituency. May God grant you good fortune.

Likewise, to all the Ministers, Associate Ministers and in particular to our Leader of the House who will be sailing soon to our island of Pukapuka. Please extend my best wishes to all our people on the island.

Another person that I would like to greet Madam Speaker is the Warrior of the Month. My congratulations and best wishes goes out to Papa Tangi Kapi who was honoured the Warrior of the Month last night at a special function. I do believe this bestowment is appropriate for him because of his long service of 40 years to Government and as well as within the Church. To our elder Papa Tangi Kapi, may God grant you the strength and good life as you go through this time.

I will now come back to the Amendment Act before the House. I will leave the rest of my acknowledgement for later on.

First of all, I give my full support to this COVID-19 Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2020 before the House and all its provisions. My acknowledgement and appreciation goes to the Solicitor General and in particular to one of his staff, Kathy Bell who served to explain to us the principles and merits behind this Bill. Although I have read this Bill thoroughly, the intension behind this I believe is to support those who arrive in our country either by airplane or by ship.

I also commend Crown Law for considering all the other legislations that will be impacted by this Bill. I have posed some questions to them yesterday regarding the relevance or the impact that this Bill has on other legislations including Maritime, Marine, and Transport. In their explanation they had already covered this and have made provisions.

Madam Speaker, I would encourage us all to pass this Bill quickly because we all know there are various ports of entry in our country. When we consider the port of entry on the island of Penrhyn, it is easy for any boat to enter because there is no legislation that prohibits their entry.

That is why it has been introduced in the House and I encourage us all to support the passing of this Bill. We recall Madam Speaker in the last past months when we heard the people in the Northern Group announce, we don't want you in Rarotonga coming to our islands. The only reason is based on COVID-19. Therefore, this Bill before the House serves to strengthen all these steps and issues within COVID-19.

I do believe Madam Speaker that this will bring comfort and confidence to our people in the islands when this is passed. To those of us who will be travelling to the Outer Islands in the next few months, this will lend support to our people in the Outer Islands. That is why I give full support and encourage all the Members to pass this Bill today, to support us in Rarotonga as well as our people in the Outer Islands.

Those are my comments Madam Speaker, thank you.

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

**MRS A. ARMSTRONG:** Praise the Lord and Kia Orana to all of us. Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Prime Minister, the Honourable Mark Brown in his new role. To the Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Robert Tapaitau and our new Minister, the Honourable Patrick Arioka and the rest of the Ministers and Members in Government, greetings.

To my Leader and all the Members of Parliament in the House and all the staff in the House today, Kia Orana.

To all our people listening in and watching on our TV, Kia Orana. And of course a special Kia Orana to my people in Ivirua. Though you may not be able to hear me or see me I still send out greetings to you all and to everyone else on Auau, Kia Orana.

I will now come back to the Bill before us today, which is the COVID-19 Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2020. I am supportive of the amendments as it does protect our borders. Firstly, by air through Rarotonga and also by sea with the various ports of entry into the Cook Islands. So we must all really support this Bill to ensure that all our borders are protected.

The reason I want to stand today is to make a comment. It was very disappointing for us in the Pa Enuu when the compulsory fourteen days quarantine was lifted. Given the vulnerability of our medical facilities and resources in the Pa Enuu, it was very disappointing for us.

The fourteen days quarantine here in Rarotonga not only protected our people or safeguarded our people here in Rarotonga but also in the Pa Enuu. We have limited medical resources, limited nursing staff in practice.

I will speak for Mangaia as I was there and we do have a high rate of NCD cases in Mangaia so we are very vulnerable with our elderly and NCD cases.

Whilst I was there, there was a couple of emergency cases which our Doctor there was able to care for but with limited resources and added precautions that needed to be taken for incoming passengers from overseas and personal issues that some of the staff had, it put a lot of pressure on the medical facilities in Mangaia at the time. So of course the lifting of the fourteen days quarantine was not met with any excitement.

Going forward, I would urge the medical or the Te Marae Ora to maybe explain the process that has been carried out in New Zealand and here because if you advise the



public of what is transpiring or what is happening, then the people will be happy to know that the process is one of robustness and protection overall.

I myself was not aware of what happens so I was told today what transpires so I am quite happy in the process that is being taken to ensure our borders are safe for arriving passengers by plane. I am sure if these processes are given out to the public, they will also be happy.

I have been advised there are plans for any evacuations if anyone is found to be sick in the Southern Group which I am happy with because at first we thought there is nothing in place.

We are doing our best in Mangaia in the three villages to get our Puna up and running to help our medical staff there. So I am happy to support this Bill to see it go through but would urge the Te Marae Ora or Government to put the awareness out there, what the process is in bringing our people or allowing our people to come home and go on to the Pa Enua because if we are left in the dark, of course we will be frightened of the unknown. But like everything else that we do as a Christian Nation, trust in the Lord with our heart and soul. Thank you very much.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, and I see the Honourable Terepai Maoate, you have the Floor.

**MR T. MAOATE:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to you and Kia Orana to all your staff. To the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, all Cabinet Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and all of the Members of Parliament, greetings. To all our people listening in to Parliament this afternoon on Rarotonga in the islands, Kia Orana.

To Vaeruarangi Ariki and our Mayor of the Island who brought the delegation from Aitutaki to the investiture of Vakatini Ariki in Rarotonga, greetings to you all.

To you Phillip Vakatini, congratulations on your investiture, and to your family, greetings. To our family on Aitutaki going through bereavement in particular the Mataiti Family, greetings in the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Papa Paramu and Mama Kau and family unfortunate for the house fire yesterday, my thoughts and support goes out to you. I do believe that you will receive some great assistance from the new Prime Minister of Government because when I look, this is a Government that is very good at supporting our people through times like this.

My congratulations to you the new Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for taking over these roles especially during this difficult time of the COVID pandemic. I trust you will make the right decisions to benefit our country.

I will come back to the Bill before the House. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Minister for this Bill and all those who worked hard to deliver this Bill. Thank you also to all those who have worked hard in the Ministry of Health to prevent this pandemic since March until today.

My thoughts go out to the businesses and all the families of our people that got impacted during this time plus also looking at the future of what we will do. When we consider

the Bill as we look to strengthen our Outer Islands as mentioned by the Member from Ivirua, the people of Aitutaki is also worrying about the situation and upon the lifting of the 14 days quarantine period the people of Aitutaki are very concerned and for two things, one out of fear for this situation and second, the question is are we ready if this happens in our country?

I had some discussions with two staff from the Ministry of Health and they expressed their doubts whether we are ready for this. I felt sorry about their comments because they told me if this virus reaches us, they will isolate themselves and they will resign from their job. For me, this is not the spirit we want in the workplace.

Therefore, my plea is that the Ministry of Health work closely with Government and all of us in unity as the saying goes, we're all in this together to ensure that our country will be really in the event the virus reaches us.

Earlier on, the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned that the New Zealand Government don't dictate what we do here in the Cook Islands but we are working together with our Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Health in New Zealand so that we are able to make good decisions for the days ahead.

However, we should be mindful that when the decision is made on our behalf, then we are all involved in this decision. Therefore, my plea to the Minister of Health is to be cautious about the decisions we make.

Last week, the Prime Minister visited Aitutaki and had discussions with the Island Council regarding compulsory quarantine and there was full support by the Island Council. I was not at the meeting but I was told about it.

Last week, the Council members met with the people in their villages and their sentiments were quite different. There still remains great concern on the island of Aitutaki just like in Ivirua, Mangaia at the limited resources of the Ministry of Health facilities there and as explained, the situation with our risk of NCD and old people on the island of Aitutaki.

Again, I emphasise my request for the Ministry of Health to work very closely with the Government and my plea is to consider the life of our people above the economic situation of our country.

I support this Bill, thank you.

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

**MRS S. NAPA:** Kia Orana to all of us in the Name of our Lord. Kia Orana Madam Speaker and the staff of Parliament. Kia Orana also to our Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister and our new Cabinet Members in the House. May God continue to provide you with His guiding light as you lead our country.

To all our Members of Parliament in the House, if I may please ask you when you return to your constituencies and islands, please extend the words of greetings from the Aroga Mana, the traditional leaders and the people of Titikaveka.

I will now come back to the COVID-19 Amendment Bill before us. I only have a few comments to make but I would like to highlight particular points so you will hear as well as our people.

As previously mentioned by the Minister of Health, this is not the first Amendment Bill to the main Act but rather the second amendment. However, I would like to say that these amendments to the main Bill is expected because we cannot predict what will happen during this time of COVID so there is a need to make amendments as the changes require.

I will come back to Section 8 of the amendment, Clause 6 with regards to the Ministerial Order. In our COVID-19 Act, the Minister has a lot of responsibilities which she depends solely on the advise from the Secretary of the Ministry of Health.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 Act, Government have worked closely with the Opposition in discussing issues relating to the COVID-19 Act.

In Clause 6 under the amendment for Section 8, the term social distancing was changed to physical distancing from any persons. How do we educate our people about the steps to follow, because we are near our festive season and it is very difficult for us to apply physical and social distancing from one another? I would presume that this is included because we have lifted the 14 days quarantine.

Can the Ministry of Health fully explain exactly when we will follow these new rules for physical distancing and whether it will be deferred to next year? When we consider our Puna in Titikaveka, so many activities will be taking place during the festive season. I would say that our Puna is one of the most active Puna on Rarotonga in assisting the Ministry of Health up to today. Through the work of our EOC Centre in particular the head Ali Macquarie and his hard working team working in our Health Center as well as all the individual Puna in our village under his leadership.

I am one of those that gets tired of listening to people complaining to me what is happening in Titikaveka. They are doing things that does not comply with the Te Marae Ora. However, you have to work hard to convince them and to persuade them to follow the regulations, steps and policies established by the Ministry of Health.

When we held our meeting with the Ministry of Health we were requested to seek within Titikaveka any homes that will be appropriate for quarantine purposes when COVID-19 arrives here. This has been completed and inspected by the village leaders in our own village. When we reach the red phase or alert in our country. Whether we are prepared and ready for the attack hence the reason for these quarantine homes were established.

It was easy to identify these houses. However, its status as if it is appropriate for quarantine purposes that is another factor. That is why we are saying no puna or village set up is ready for quarantine if and when COVID-19 reaches our country. In our village there is over 300 elders over 60 plus years in the village. They are of course

among the high-risk of those sectors in our village along with those with NCDs that would be impacted by the pandemic.

However, for our village I want to ensure the Minister that our village is working very hard in conjunction with the Ministry of Health to get us ready for the pandemic. They have been working very hard since the beginning of this period until now and still working very hard.

I now refer to section 23 regarding the amendment of offences because we are aware that during the quarantine period of those that arrived back home there were some that breached the quarantine regulations and rules. At first it was said that they had breached the regulations and then another report they have followed the rules; there were different notions of these that came out.

However, since my entry into this House and when I refer to all the offences stipulated in different legislations in the House. In my mind I do not know of any that has been followed according to the legislation. Therefore, my plea to the Minister and the Ministry of Health on this point. If and when the COVID-19 arrives in our country and there is a need for quarantine and there are breaches. Please enforce these fines and offences within the Act.

If you feel that you can only move softly on enforcing these offences, please ask for our help from this side of the House because we have all pledged to do the right thing to protect our people. Like the saying goes, we are all in this together.

And those are my only comments on this Bill before the House. And I am giving my full support and asking all of us to follow the provisions within the Bill. From me to all of us my few words to end – be vigilant, wear a mask and do physical distancing. Kia Orana and Kia Manuia.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Albert Nicholas you have the Floor.

**MR A. NICHOLAS:** Madam Speaker, all the staff and all the Honourable Members of this House and all our people listening to our broadcast – Kia Orana to all of us.

Madam Speaker, I rise to support the Bill before the House, and if I may just share a few thoughts on this particular issue before I give the chance to the Honourable Member from Tamarua to speak.

Madam Speaker, I rise to share my thoughts basically to give the people in this country the confidence. A confidence that requires trust in the processes before the House this afternoon Madam Speaker. Why our community needs trust and believe is because of the amount of misinformation that has been going out in the general public.

Misinformation concerning this very issue that is before the House and the quarantine process. Misinformation based on hearsay and gossip. Madam Speaker, I don't think when the Honourable Minister woke up this week that she decided to put an amendment to the House. She did not bring this Bill to the House based on her whim when she woke up one morning, or just her personal thoughts of just bringing one to this House, Madam Speaker.

No, no, no Madam Speaker – no, no, no. This Bill was brought to this House Madam Speaker based on sound advice to the Minister – both from the legal fraternity and obviously from the Health fraternity as well. Because of the nature of this virus and this diseases Madam Speaker, I suspect that this Bill will keep evolving and evolving over time. I suspect we will keep bringing it to this House and continue to amend it over time.

The Honourable Prime Minister will also be calling urgent Cabinet meetings time and time and time again. Why, because of the nature of this virus Madam Speaker. When Auckland sneezes we jump so that we don't catch a cold and that is the nature of this virus. It is not the Cook Islands Governments' fault. In fact, this Government should be commended, the former Prime Minister and the current Prime Minister should be commended.

Cabinet should be commended. The officials involved in this sector should be commended, the wise people within this team should be commended. Maybe the Opposition should be commended.

But what I am trying to get at Madam Speaker is that our people needs to be confident in the process that has been tasked to our Government. When the Prime Minister calls an urgent Cabinet meeting to lift the quarantine Madam Speaker, he didn't just wake up that morning half cut or drunk and decided that he would do that.

No, Madam Speaker it was because of sound advice, proper advice and legal guidance. I know some of our Members in the Opposition are sick and tired of quarantine on and quarantine off, quarantine on and quarantine off, but Madam Speaker it is what it is required for us to keep afloat.

An Honourable Member of the Opposition earlier on made reference to our safety against this virus, but there is also a financial safety net that is required for each and every Cook Islander in this country and that is why our borders are very important. It is our only link to the outside world. Sadly, at this stage the only link we have to the outside world is Auckland. So what happens in Auckland Madam Speaker is just as important to me and to each one of us and to every Cook Islander in this country as the state in our country is to us.

So coming back to the Bill before the House, I suspect that this Bill will keep evolving and evolving and possibly some cases contracting until this wretched virus is brought to its knees. So to our people listening out there in the community, the decision this Government and the decision that this Cabinet and the decision that this Prime Minister makes is solely based on your wellbeing. Thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member, and I see the Honourable Member, Tetangi Matapo you have the Floor.

**MRS T. MATAPO:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Greetings to everybody here in the House this afternoon. Kia Orana to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and all Cabinet Ministers. Kia Orana also to all the Members of Parliament gathered in this House, greetings in the Name of the Lord.

I want to convey special acknowledgement to our former Prime Minister, Henry Puna. Thank you for Mangaia's bus because I know that all Government officials that come to Mangaia are transported by this bus.

I want to inform the Prime Minister of the day that this bus is being utilised to transport visitors on the island during this time. Therefore, Prime Minister there is a request for tourism in Mangaia, just wait it will come.

I also want to extend my Kia Orana and greetings to the people in my constituency of Tamarua on Mangaia. To the three Pillars on the island and to all of you, Kia Orana on this beautiful day.

I would also like to acknowledge the media person that releases Government updates and explains about those updates particularly the one relating to COVID-19 which we are also discussing today through this COVID Bill. These updates has been sent via email by Jaywene. Thank you Jaywene for all the messages you sent to Mangaia particularly the updates on COVID-19.

In support of the comments made by the Member of Parliament for Ivirua, I just want to share with you some of the issues that has been discussed in the meeting on Mangaia.

As mentioned earlier by the Member for Avatiu, our people must have trust in the procedures of our Government, however, the most important thing is for the information to be delivered to our people.

As mentioned by the Member for Ivirua, when the people of Mangaia heard that the quarantine period has been lifted, the people was really worried. The people was worried because the information was not given to them. When the Te Marae Ora meeting was held in my village of Tamarua, these were some of the issues that the people brought to the meeting. The first issue was the importance of delivering correct information. One difficulty we have on the island is there is no radio broadcast, and in Ivirua and Tamarua there is no television.

One of the request that was put to Te Marae Ora and also to myself was for some explanations or information on the issue of COVID-19 to be communicated to the people of Mangaia so that they have a fair idea about what is happening. Our elderly people rely on the radio to get information and they do not have Facebook. Our elderly people want to get more information on this virus. I know this information that I am requesting is from developments in the past because I believe what we are talking about now is three steps ahead. I know the people of Mangaia do not have up to date information on this virus that is going around in the world.

If there are any posters, I think that is another avenue to educate the people and we will await when the radio and television will operate again on our island. I also want to extend my thank you to all the staff of Te Marae Ora on the island and all the supporters that have come together to support the initiatives of the COVID-19.

One of the issues that the people have raised is for our people listening into our programmes from outside of our country, if you love your families and friends here in

the Cook Islands, please we ask you to have patience until we understand more about this virus.

The other issue that has been raised earlier is whether we are ready for this virus. I know that in Rarotonga the Puna are doing well. For us in Mangaia, we started our Puna in March but today when we stopped the safety measures on COVID, everything else came to a stop. When quarantine is enforced again, we will start all over again. So, to all of us we can see this Bill is for our protection and I acknowledge those who spent time working on this Amendment Bill in order to protect us.

These are my thoughts and I give my full support to the Bill before us. Thank you.

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

**MR T. TUAVERA:** Thank you Madam Speaker, I should not take long. I will not greet anyone now because we have the opportunity to do that after.

I just want to go straight to the Clauses that are – thank you to the SG for explaining the Clauses to us because we did not understand the meaning of some of the technical terms and references in the Bill that lawyers use. One of them was the conflict with other enactments on page 2 number (3) as it reads there, “*If a provision of a Ministerial order ...*” that is what I am talking about because it talks about the Act, the Constitution and the Regulations which ends up with the provision of the Ministerial Order prevails.

At the time of reading this Madam Speaker, we thought that this would take over from the Constitution, admittedly it was the wording that we did not understand. So, that was put to rest and I think the Opposition was happy with the explanation from the SG. Also Madam Speaker, I believe this Bill have a life span of, should I say as long as the COVID is around. I suppose there will always be amendments put forward by the Member of Parliament from RAPP. I want to reassure the Member for RAPP if he is not sure about the support from the Opposition, I want to assure him we are committed 200% to anything to fight this COVID from our country. But I must say that we are also disappointed with the lifting of the quarantine and that, we cannot walk away from. If the PM has mentioned the outdated matrix, I would have run outside put my long overcoat on to come back in and dodge the bullet from the Prime Minister.

While we are sitting outside having lunch, this question was asked to me in regards to the Puna payments that we were getting of \$3,000. Since my colleague here asked the good Prime Minister how much is left of the millions that we have for COVID, I think the reply was something like \$20 million and we are looking healthy. If I look back Madam Speaker, our Puna lives on this payment from Te Marae Ora.

In the meantime, we the Members of Parliament in our constituency are trying to keep it alive by feeding them. So, please Minister if you can look into this and let us know when this will start again, Nikao can open theirs again.

Further on this Bill Madam Speaker, it is a Bill that is starting to correct itself. We are looking at the Maritime Border Regulations and this has been corrected. I think it is timely that it has come in right now because our border is quite big or our ocean is quite

big. If drug smugglers can get into our country without being spotted, then other ships are bound to sail into our waters without being spotted as well. Maybe our patrol boat is going to Pukapuka Madam Speaker. Hopefully it will take our Member for Pukapuka to his island so he can spend Christmas there.

I have no problem with Section 31 Madam Speaker, this is straightforward it is correcting again, I must repeat that word, its correcting itself and as I have said before, the lifespan of this COVID Bill is as long as the COVID is alive so let us kill it. I believe all my colleagues on this side is working for our people. I believe the same for the Government side. So, we should be working together to fight this COVID pandemic coming our way. On that note Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

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

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** Greetings to all of us this early afternoon. I believe I am the last speaker on our side. Therefore, I will give a brief statement on this Bill.

First of all, I thank the Prime Minister – this is becoming a habit of ours and this habit is that if there is a Bill to be introduced, you pass it on to us so that we have the opportunity to educate ourselves so we know most of it before we come into the House.

With this particular Bill, my office received a call to inform us that once Cabinet approves the Bill, it will be submitted to us. I did request to please send the Bill to us now but we all understand it is subject to Cabinet approval. We were also advised that if we require any clarifications, the office of the Solicitor General can provide that assistance to our Office.

I would also like to commend the Prime Minister because this is the first time that ten days before the Sitting we were all advised about the Sitting. In our language we call this a new step and it is a good step. I ask that we continue to do this so we do not surprise ourselves.

With regards to this COVID-19 Amendment Bill, I am happy because we were fully informed about the Bill and the reason for introducing it at this Sitting. I do understand that the Bill was given to you late the reason it was also sent to us late.

However, I commend that as soon as you knew about the Bill, you submitted it to us so we were able to familiarise ourselves with the Bill and understand it.

I would like to thank the Solicitor General for coming to the Opposition Office yesterday to explain the COVID-19 Amendment Bill. I believe that through these explanations that were given, questions were asked, maybe not all, you have heard some other questions asked and most of it was clarified yesterday. I guess the message from our side of the House is we are improving with our process going forward and I would like that to continue.

The new amendments and changes in the Bill, I want to cover them briefly. The first one is to extend the life of this Act. We know that under the Principal Act, its life was only restricted to 12 months. Even back then, I don't think we wanted it to go to 12



months, we wanted it to be shorter. But we agreed that it should go for 12 months and if we needed to terminate it sooner then we could.

So this extension that is being proposed in the Bill has extended the closing of this legislation to the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021. While we don't like this extension because it suggests that this virus is going to be around up until July, the reality is and based on what we have come through, it is possible that it will go up to July and maybe further.

The second part of the amendment relates to the Ministerial Orders and it is to clarify or specify or make clear the Orders that are covered under the Ministerial Orders. There is also some elaboration in the Bill as far as the Ministerial Orders are concerned. It is that part that we spent sometimes yesterday with the Solicitor General and we voiced our concerns and he was able to explain the position to us.

I want to try and allay some of the confusion that is going on in this House. Our main concern with the lifting of the quarantine is because it is not based on science. It is not based on advice from the Ministry of Health. So there is no misinformation and there should not be any misinformation. What Government is saying, what Cabinet is saying, well and rightly so we are the ones that take the advice. It hasn't been said but in effect that is the implications of it.

We don't need to take the advice; we are the ones that makes the decision, and that is understandable and that applies to lawyers as well. If you don't wish to take the advice of good lawyers, you go to bush lawyers. If you don't want to take the advice of good plumbers, you go to bush plumbers, and if you don't want a good builder to build your house you go to a not so good builder.

The consequences of making those decisions however could be costly. I myself have had a not so good builder build a veranda which collapsed and it ended up with me paying more through a better builder to replace it. And you are correct, I truly understand how decisions are made at Cabinet level but I guess the request is please don't play doctors with the lives of our people.

There is confusion and I accept there is confusion because we had meetings in the two Vaka in Arorangi and Takitumu. The confusion has come out of fear and we should accept that people should be fearful. There is no shame in being scared. Now if we are so unhealthy because our NCD level is so high, why shouldn't we be scared.

I also want to thank the Prime Minister for accepting our request to meet with him and nominees that he brought along to the meeting in the Cabinet room last week. He didn't have to meet with us if he didn't want to but he did. We had I believe a very civil discussion and the position I am putting to Parliament would not be news to him because that was the position that I had at the meeting as well.

Now, the third aspect of this Bill with regard to the taxation aspect. I don't really want to say, I told you so but we should remember that when the COVID-19 Act and the taxation aspect was inserted into the Act, I had some difficulties with it because I felt it was in the wrong place at that time. But even at that time everybody was rushing to get it through so that we can have the measures in place and so we have an excuse. We should be excused for that error.

The other aspect and the final aspect that I am pleased to see in this Bill is the measures with regard to our borders that are usually under the Maritime Transport Act. I accept that we can't be thinking of everything at one time especially when this virus is new and it is developing and it has developed and it will develop going into the future.

I did suggest to the Solicitor General yesterday that perhaps we could curb the Ministerial Orders so that it is subject to or comply with the advice from the Ministry of Health. He explained to me just as the Prime Minister has explained about the level and where decisions are made. I thanked him for his explanation but I didn't necessary agree with him.

I think I do understand the need for having these Ministerial Orders in place and I guess the Minister should be comforted by the fact that we will be looking at each Ministerial Order that is made under the provision of this Bill.

Finally, I just wanted to indicate to this House that we do understand the fine balance between health and the economy and the decision that one makes is not an easy one but our position in this House is that if at all possible, we should always put our people's lives first. We should promote prevention instead of cure especially so in a population that has a very vulnerable number of people. On that note, we on the Opposition support this Bill. Thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, and I give the Floor to the Member for Manihiki.

**MR H. PUNA:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Greetings to you, Members of Parliament and all our people listening in to our Sitting. I am really comforted standing here as the Member for Manihiki because the arrows from the Opposition is not coming my way, it's going straight to the other side and my neck is not painful from looking sideways. From where I am, I am looking directly at you.

Madam Speaker, if I may to add to the sentiments you expressed regarding the passing of our former Prime Minister. Unfortunately, I was not able to get to the island for the funeral of our former Prime Minister as this was sudden. However, I am comforted with the fact that we conducted a State Celebration for his passing last week. So my thanks to the Office of the Prime Minister for holding this function.

My words of comfort is also extended to all our people who are under this cloud of bereavement and as well as to our island of Manihiki. This very gifted artist from there Dinky and his father Papa Takai, how sad, and during this last couple of days the passing of Papa Ioane Kaitara. We will wait for his service to be announced, when and where it will be held. To all our people throughout our country who are under this cloud of bereavement, my condolences and words of comfort to you all.

Madam Speaker, I will come back to the Bill before the House. I give my full support, strong support to this Bill. As mentioned by the Member from RAAPA, this Bill serves to be our answer, our protection against this pandemic for all the changes and the quick changes that is taking place.

It is not appropriate that we are concerned especially when gaps are being found in this legislation because this virus does not have only one strain or behaviour. When we plug a gap then it comes from another angle. So it is appropriate this is what we do. But I ask our people Madam Speaker, let us not be afraid. There is no reason for us to be afraid.

I am troubled by what I heard about all the meetings that has been conducted by our Members on the other side. Maybe the reasoning is right. However, what also transpired this increased the fear or the worry amongst our people. We lost our mind through fear. To me that wasn't very nice.

I am heartened and comforted by the explanation provided by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health and explaining the reasons as to why the quarantine was lifted. I do pray that our people have heard this because this is the truth.

I would also like to emphasise the thought that we think sometimes that maybe the Government has an ulterior motive why they lifted the quarantine. We should never think like that because right from the outset Madam Speaker, back in March and until today we have made it very clear that the priority through this difficult times is to ensure that the health and safety of our people is always paramount.

The best evidence that I can point to this is our history since the COVID started to plague this world. We have kept this virus out of our country. We have followed all the sound medical advice. So what more proof do we need that that is still Government's plan and priority? It is not appropriate for our people outside and within this House to suspect that Government has an ulterior motive for what they have done. So please be careful about what we say. Talk is cheap but we only have to look back at our record since the pandemic hit this world we have been safe and we are still safe. One of only five or six countries in the world.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, could I just interrupt your debate. Since we are meant to finish at 2.00 p.m. we will ask the Leader of the House to extend our time of Sitting by Motion please.

**MR T. ELIKANA:** Madam Speaker, as you have correctly alluded to, I move:

**To have Standing Order 54 (3) suspended which relates to Sitting hours for Friday Sittings of Parliament to enable the extension of this Sitting from 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.**

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

**Secinded by the Honourable Minister, George Angene**

I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You may continue Honourable Member.

**MR H. PUNA:** I was talking about the record of this Government in keeping this country safe from this virus. That is the best and strongest evidence that our people should take to heart that that is still the priority of this Government. The leadership might have changed but the commitment has not. So please, let's not be afraid because our thinking and our hopes are all the same.

By the way Madam Speaker, I am comforted when I heard the words of congratulations from the Opposition for our new Prime Minister. The only issue is this is old news. If they didn't run out of this House that day, this would already have been done.

Madam Speaker, I will not be long or else the Leader of the House will be left behind by Te Kūpapa. That is my main message to ask our people not to be afraid. Your Government has done and is doing and will continue to do the right thing for our people. Let us not let fear blind our eyes, have faith. Thank you Madam Speaker.

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

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise to give support to this Bill and to provide some comments and clarifications. I couldn't help hearing the support from the Members of the Opposition for this Bill. However, it was interspersed with a few spikes that they mentioned that I think needs to be corrected.

Firstly, to my good colleague from Ngātangiia, the amendments to this Bill are not corrections Madam Speaker. They are amendments to strengthen this COVID Bill.

For instance Madam Speaker, inserting a power of Regulations to be made to impose restrictions with respect to our Maritime Boarder. These are not to strengthen what is already a very strong Maritime Boarder as was passed on to me by those from New Zealand who came and assessed our Maritime Boarder but it is also to satisfy the legal requirements in respect of the quarantine free travel arrangements that we are in the process of discussing with New Zealand. These arrangements Madam Speaker has to be reciprocal and it has to be both ways. We cannot just have quarantine free travel one way.

The Member for Titikaveka has mentioned the hundreds of people that are over 60 at risk of NCD. How many of these need to go to New Zealand for medical check-up or for medical referral but are refusing to go because they do not want to go in quarantine. How many parents want to send their children back to University to get ready but are having difficulties because of the quarantine requirements? However, we are working very hard Madam Speaker with New Zealand and we are also working very hard on the return so that there is no quarantine when our people come back home.

The strengthening and the broadening of the powers of Ministerial Orders Madam Speaker is put in place to make sure that it clarifies the status of air crew and maritime crew are in our ability to maintain the entry requirements under our Entry Departure Residence Act.

Furthermore, it allows the widening of application that nobody thought of back in March which may include the general wearing of masks in places enclosed or in public transportation or on aircraft. I did hear the Leader of the Opposition mention the provision repealing the allowing of the Minister of Finance to make tax orders within this particular Act because the preferred method is under its own legislation which is coming up immediately after this particular Bill.

Yes, I heard you say, I told you so but I do recall at the time in March Madam Speaker when our people in the business community and the Tourism sector in particular were knocking on our door and begging us for support. What are we going to do?

Within the space of two weeks Madam Speaker, we were able to put out over \$20 million worth of support to our people to keep them with income and to keep our businesses afloat. That was done Madam Speaker by allowing the wide powers that are in this COVID Act that allow us to do that very very quickly. What it did Madam Speaker if we recall was that, it bought us time and that time Madam Speaker reviews very valuably by learning more information about this virus but also at a time to put in place appropriate legislation to deliver the support needed to those who needed most.

Of course, the most important aspect of these amendments in this Bill is the extension of the life of the COVID Act until the 31<sup>st</sup> of July next year. This Madam Speaker has taken with the view that with the news of the COVID vaccines been developed will not be until at least the middle of next year for its wide spread distribution once it is approved. Therefore, we may still need these provisions in the COVID Act in the even that we need to move quickly.

However, we are mindful that the powers in this Act are very very powerful which is why there is a timeline on the effectiveness of this Act than why it should be ended and any further extension requires when it comes back to this House for the support of Parliament.

It is not a perfect legislation, there is no such thing as perfect legislation, just that there is no such thing as perfect legal advise and no such thing as perfect medical advise. It is with that view Madam Speaker that this Government takes very very strongly the decisions that it makes regarding things such as lifting the supervise quarantine. We take into account as much advise an information as we can.

There is no way we would make a decision that would put our people at risk. After very good and careful assessment, and if the judgement is correct, we will make the judgement that we think is best if the risk is low enough to warrant the lifting of supervise quarantine then this Government will make those decisions. We must all face reality of the situation around the world and around our region. It does not do anybody any good to hide your head in the sand.

In my private discussions that I have had with our medical doctors in New Zealand including our very own Dr. Kiki Maoate, I was reassured. There were comments being made at these public meetings that we were going to need hundred beds in each village and take care of a thousand people up at the hospital. I was told that that was not right. It was just incorrect to have those statements been made in the public.

The Te Marae Ora is not useless and by the fact that we do not have the virus here since March, shows how much hard work has been put in by our Ministry of Health and our boarder agencies and all of the Government in protecting our people.

The current systems that we have in place with our Ministry of Health to protect our people, to identify this by risk, to contain this by risk and to manage this by risk if ever it comes in to our country are such that there is a high level of confidence from our Health professions.

Certainly, we need to build and strengthen our Health requirement which is why we put \$8 million into the Ministry of Health. That is why we are building our own PCI laboratory. That is why we are installing our own CT scanner. That is why we are doing a whole series of things to try and make sure that in the event we have a worst case scenario of intensive care that we have sufficient equipment on hand in our country to deal with any case.

So, I encourage our people to take the advice that has been provided to maintain our hand hygiene and our coughing hygiene. These are all good practice that we need to uphold during this time while we wait and see if the world will have a vaccine that will come out very, very quickly.

But the good news for us is that our Government has signed an agreement with New Zealand and Australia who have committed to providing vaccines to Pacific countries including ours in particular in the event that their supplies become available. That is why Madam Speaker with the passing of this particular Bill we can look forward to the next few months over the Christmas and New Year period with hope and optimism rather than with fear and panic.

I, therefore, commend this Bill before the House Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, I will just confirm, was that your rounding up Honourable Prime Minister? Alright thank you very much.

I will now put the Question. The Question is:

**That the COVID-19 Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2020  
be read a Second time?**

**Motion agreed to**

**ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE:** Long Title: An Act to amend the COVID-19 Act 2020.

**BILL READ A SECOND TIME**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you Honourable Members, I now resolve Parliament into the Committee of the Whole House.

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE**

**MADAM CHAIRMAN:** We will now go through the Clauses of the Bill.

Clause 1: Sets out the Title of the Bill

Clause 2:

I beg your pardon; I will start again.

Clause 1: Is the Title, this Act is the COVID-19 Amendment Act (No. 2) 2020

Clause 2: Commencement

Clause 3: Principal Act

Clause 4: Section 4 amended (Commencement and duration)

I put the Question:

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

**Motion agreed to**

Clause 5: Section 7 replaced (Conflict with other enactments)

Clause 6: Section 8 amended (Ministerial order)

I put the Question:

**That Clause 5, Clause 6, Clause 7 stands part of the Bill?**

I beg your pardon; I beg your pardon. I will do that again - please.

Clause 5: Section 7 replaced (Conflict with other enactments)

Clause 6: Section 8 amended (Ministerial order).

Clause 7: Section 23 amended (Offences)

I put the Question:

**That Clause 5, Clause 6, Clause 7 stands part of the Bill?**

**Motion agreed to**

Clause 8: Section 29, repealed (Tax Orders)

Clause 9: Section 31, amended (Section 9A notices under the Entry, Residence and Departure Act 1971-72)

Clause 10: New Sections 32 and 33 inserted

I put the Question:

**That Clause 8, Clause 9 and Clause 10 stands part of the Bill?**

**Motion agreed to**

Long Title: An Act to amend the COVID-19 Act 2020.

I put the Question:

**That the Long Title stands part of the Bill?**

**Motion agreed to**

I put the Question:

**That the Bill be reported to Parliament with no amendments?**

**Motion agreed to**

Parliament is resumed.

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

**HON. R. TOKI-BROWN:** Madam Speaker, I am happy to report:

**That the COVID-19 Amendment (No. 2) Bill 2020 has gone through the Committee stage without amendments**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I put the Question:

**That the Report be adopted?**

**Motion agreed to**

We will now go to the Third Reading of the Bill.

I call the Minister Responsible to move the Motion for the Third Reading of the Bill.

**HON. R. TOKI-BROWN:** Madam Speaker, I move:

**That this Bill be read a Third time?**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I put the Question:

**That the Bill be read a Third time?**

Oh! I beg your pardon. No Seconder. I am watching the time.

**Seconded by the Honourable Member, Tingika Elikana**



I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

**ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE:** Long Title: An Act to amend the COVID-19 Act 2020.

**BILL READ A THIRD TIME**

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

We will go back to Orders of the Day.

**ORDERS OF THE DAY**

The Orders of the Day is on the Income Tax (Tax Credit for Small Short-Term Accommodation Providers) Amendment Bill 2020.

Thank you and I call the Minister Responsible to move for the Second Reading of the Bill.

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

**That the Income Tax (Tax Credit for Small Short-Term Accommodation Providers) Amendment Bill be read a Second time**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, and you may continue Prime Minister.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Members will recall earlier this year that the Government announced a range of measures that were intended to provide social, economic support to individuals and businesses. This was to reduce the hardship resulting from the closing of our borders to protect the Cook Islands from COVID-19.

One of the announced measures was an income tax credit of up to \$2,000 to small short-term and holiday accommodation providers. The aim of this measure was to provide some cash flow relief to qualifying accommodators as part of the economic recovery phase once our border had reopened.

When it was first announced, it was intended that this credit would be applied against the income tax payable for the 2020 year which is due for payment in October 21. However, due to the extended border closures and the economic consequence of these closures, the tax credit has now been brought forward a year to be applied against the 2019 income tax that was due for payment on 1<sup>st</sup> October this year. As this credit is to be applied to tax that is already past due, a refund of the amount of the credit a taxpayer is entitled to will be made where the tax has already been paid. If the tax has not been paid, the credit will be applied to the tax account reducing the amount payable.

A short-term accommodation provider is defined as a person who provides short-term accommodation offered at a nightly rate for ten or fewer people at the end of the 2019 income year. The reference to accommodating ten people or fewer, varies from the original announcement that referred to ten beds or fewer.

This amendment has been made to clarify the definition of who is eligible to apply for the credit and to avoid confusion of what is a bed. For example, does a double bed count as one bed as physically it is one bed or does it count as two beds as it is capable of sleeping two people? This definition does not matter whether the accommodation is provided at one property or multiple properties.

So to be clear a \$2,000 tax credit being offered is only available for the 2019 income year and a person who wishes to claim the tax credit must apply by completing the relevant form provided by the Collector of Inland Revenue. The tax credit will be limited to the greater of \$2,000 or the tax payable on income from the qualifying business. That means the tax credit is only applicable to income from the accommodation business and cannot be used to reduce the tax payable on other income or transferred to another taxpayer nor is it available as a payment or refund to the taxpayer. Any unused portion of the tax credit cannot be claimed in subsequent years.

The tax credit will be applied to the entity that owns and operates the property. The tax credit if for example the property is owned and operated under a company, the tax credit will be applied to the tax payable by the company. If in the case a property is jointly owned, the tax credit will be allocated to the partners on the same basis as the allocation of the income by allowing a credit of up to \$2,000 against the income tax payable for the 2019 year we will reduce the cash flow burden on those small accommodation providers during this time of the border closure.

Initial estimates by the RMD estimated around two hundred accommodators would qualify for this however, more current estimates show that approximately four hundred accommodators will qualify and receive tax credits amounting up to \$800,000. By applying this support through the income tax credit, we are making sure that those who qualify and who need the credit are actually receiving it whereas those who are not owing tax at the Tax Department do not just gain an extra \$2,000. This allows the Government to really target the economic response to those that really need it.

Therefore, Madam Speaker that in a nutshell is this particular piece of Legislation that is before us. It is very straight forward, it is targeted at a small group which is our small holiday home accommodators and it provides some relief during this period. Therefore Madam Speaker, I commend this Bill before the House.

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

**Secinded by the Honourable Patrick Arioka**

I propose the Question:

**That the Bill be read a Second time?**

The Floor is open. I see the Honourable Member, Tina Browne you have the Floor.

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** Greetings again to all of us this afternoon. I think I will be the only Member from this side of the House who will speak on this Bill. First I would like to thank Helen for coming around to the Opposition Office yesterday to explain or clarify the terms and conditions of this Bill.

The Bill is very straight forward. If it is going to help four hundred people that deserve to be helped, then we support this Bill. As I understand it, the nature of the Bill is to provide a credit of \$2,000 against any tax liability people might have once they file their return for the year 2019 and we understand that this Bill is consistent with the response on the economic side.

Like you Prime Minister, we struggle with the definition of what is a bed and what isn't a bed especially, Mr Prime: I see the Honourable Prime Minister. Thank you Honourable Member, Tina Browne.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. We have no further comments as well from this side of the House. We thank the Members of the Opposition for their support. It may seem like a small amount of money to these businesses but every little bit in this time counts. So thank you very much and we look forward to its passage through the House.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Prime Minister. I now put the Question:

**That the Bill be read a Second time?**

**Motion agreed to**

**ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE:** Long Title: An Act to mitigate the economic hardship resulting from measures taken to protect the Cook Islands from COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019) by providing a tax credit for small short-term accommodation providers for the 2019 income year.

**BILL READ A SECOND TIME**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, I now resolve Parliament into Committee of the Whole House to go through the Bill.

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE**

Clause 1: Title

Clause 2: Commencement

Clause 3: Principal Act

Clause 4: New Section 186A and cross-heading inserted

I put the Question:

**That Clauses 1, 2, 3 and 4 stands part of the Bill?**

**Motion agreed to**

Long Title: An Act to mitigate the economic hardship resulting from measures taken to protect the Cook Islands from COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) by providing a tax credit for small short-term accommodation providers for the 2019 income year.

I put the Question:

**That the Long Title stands part of the Bill?**

**Motion agreed to**

I put the Question:

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

**Motion agreed to**

Parliament is resumed.

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

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

**That the progress of the Bill went through the Committee with no amendment**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I put the Question:

**That the Report be adopted?**

**Motion agreed to**

We will now go to the Third Reading of the Bill. I call the Minister to move for the Third Reading of the Bill.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Madam Speaker, I move:

**That the Income Tax (Tax Credit for Small Short-term Accommodation Providers) Amendment Bill 2020 be read a Third time**

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

**Secundered by the Honourable Tai Tura**

I put the Question:

**That the Bill be read a Third time?**

**Motion agreed to**

**ACTING CLERK AT THE TABLE:** An Act to mitigate the economic hardship resulting from measures taken to protect the Cook Islands from COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) by providing a tax credit for small short-term accommodation providers for the 2019 income year.

**BILL READ A THIRD TIME**

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

I believe the Prime Minister wants the Floor now.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. As we have completed the official order of business today, the move was for Members to now be able to give their greetings to their constituencies for the Christmas period as many of them will be heading out to their islands.

Therefore Madam Speaker, I move:

**That Standing Order, 33 the Record of proceedings and Standing Order 47 the Official Report to be prepared is suspended to enable the Members five minutes each to convey their Christmas greetings to their constituencies and the nation without interpretation**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I seek a Secunder for the Motion.

**Secinded by the Honourable Deputy Speaker, Tai Tura**

I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

I actually noticed that if you are taking five minutes, it will be more than the allocated time, and we said we would finish at 4.00 p.m. We will just see how we can do this within the limit of time that we have set ourselves at 4.00 p.m. If you can do it for less than five minutes, go for less than five minutes.

I see the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa.

**MR V. TUPA:** Kia Orana again to all of us in the Name of our Lord. Madam Speaker, I do not want my speech to be translated, and again I say greetings to all of us today in the Name of our Lord.

Firstly, I thank God for bringing me into this House to be the voice of my people.

Secondly, I would like to thank all the Ministers in our House today. Firstly, to our Honourable Prime Minister. Why do I need to thank him? I thank him for increasing our constituency funding by \$5,000. However, Honourable Prime Minister, this is still not enough. Maybe next year you will be able to increase it again by another \$5,000 to bring the total to \$20,000.

Secondly, I would also like to thank our Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Robert Tapaitai and the Secretary for ICI for brining my dream to reality by improving the roads in Rangiatea although they are not quite complete. Next year all the roads will be completed including the roads at the School. Those of us who know Papa Fred Goodwin's road, for 32 years this road has been in a bad state but today the road has been improved and beautified. I thank the Minister and his Secretary, Dianne Puna for doing this.

Thirdly, I also want to thank my Honourable friend George Angene for helping me with the work in my village this year. Honourable Minister, I sincerely thank you for all the help you freely gave without charging. Thank you so much.

Fourthly, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister Rose Brown. Why do I need to thank her? Only the Minister and I knows about the assistance she gave me. What happened was that an award was granted to a member from my constituency and the Minister knows what that award is. I will not tell you what it is, you might go and ask the Minister for a similar award. Thank you Minister for your help.

I also want to thank the Honourable Minister, Vaine Mokoroa for also providing assistance to our disabilities in my village through the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Fifth, thank you also to our new Minister today Patrick Arioka for assisting our Takitumu School. Thank you for providing our School in Rangitea with some seedlings to help them with their school projects.

These are my words of appreciation now but I could see I have two more minutes of speaking time.

I want to thank all the people in my village. To the six different denominations in my village and the Ministers of each church. The Churches, the Revival Church, Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Cook Islands Christian Church, Corner Stone Church and the Apostolic Church, I greet you and thank you all. Although we have a small village but we have six churches located in our village.

I also convey my appreciation and greetings to the Aronga Mana in the village from one end to the other end of the village. To all the Ui Mataiapo and the Ui Rangatira I greet you all. To all our elderlies in the village, may God continue to bless you with health and strength. I promise you all my continual support in our constituency of Rangiatea.

I convey my sympathy to all the families that have in the recent times lost their loved ones. To our recent bereavement, the family of Papa Tana Wichman, to your good wife and children, may God comfort you all during this time.

I convey my greetings to the Pu Tapere or the leader of the Village Committee of Rangiatea working closely with the staff in our Puna office of Matavera. We will wait patiently for our allocation of \$3,000 for the months of November, December and January which will be given to support our Puna office.

To conclude my greetings a special mention to all our English speaking friends that are living in the village of Matavera and including our Pacific families like Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Kiribati and others like Indonesia and so on. I would like to say, thank you very much for being part of the village of Matavera.

To conclude my speech, I would like to greet my mother Mama Ngai and my Papa Motu, Kia Orana to you both in the Name of the Lord. In addition, to my good supportive wife and my true love, may God bless you as you continue to assist me in serving our people in our village.

Together with my wife, we convey our greetings for the Christmas and the New Year. God Bless us all – Kia Orana and Kia Manuia.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, and I see the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera.

**MR T. TUAVERA:** Madam Speaker I have only two minutes left of my allotted time because the Honourable Member has used three minutes already.

*(Laughter)*

Kia Orana in the Name of the Lord to all the Honourable Members today. Kia Orana to the people in the village of Ngatangiia listening to our broadcast today. Kia Orana to our Paramount Chiefs, Pama Kainuku and Pa Ariki – who are both living in Auckland for medical reasons, greetings to you.

To the three sectors of our community – the church, the traditional and the Government, Kia Orana. To the Ui Rangatira, Ui Mataiapo, Kau Taunga and to the greatest among us and to the lesser among our people in Ngatangiia, Kia Orana. To the Church Minister, Papa Setu Marsters, your good wife and all the children – Kia Orana in the Name of the Lord. To the Assistant Ministers, Papa Rau and family, the Secretary of the Church, Mauri Toa and family, to all the deacons, the elders and all the Ngatangiia CICC congregation – Kia Orana to you all.

Greetings to all the different denominations in Ngatangiia; greetings to your Church Ministers and all your congregations – May God Bless you all for the festive season ahead of us.

To all sports code in our village from seniors to our juniors, Kia Orana. To all our supporters, the parents, the aunties and uncles – thank you for your continuous and strong support in our village. To our hard coming Club Captain, Tiri Trego Toa who keeps the grass mowed on our sports field, the Church yard and any other untidy properties around the village, our Mister Fixit does the good work – thank you Tiri for the good work.

To all the businesses, thank you for your ongoing sponsorship in our village from the management and all your staff – Merry Christmas to you all. To all our people from different parts of the world that lives in Ngatangiia – to those of you that are caught up in this COVID-19 epidemic that can't get back to your countries – God Bless you all for being patient – Merry Christmas to you all.

To all the families that had loved ones passed away, here and a far, may the blessings of our good Lord be upon you all. I want to thank the Government, Minister Tapaitau and the Secretary of ICI, Diana Puna for all the work that is being carried out by Landholdings in our village. It's all good work that is happening now and I think we are getting ready for the floods that we are expecting to come through pretty soon. So thank you very much for that.

I am also hoping that our road from Turangi to Avana will be resealed because that is the last bit of road in Ngatangiia to be done. To our people in Muri, thank you for showing patience with all the work being done in the runoff streams and soon on the main road from Arakua to Muri where bigger culverts will be installed under the roads and hopefully the resealing of that part of the road as well.

To our hard working nurses and helpers in our Ngatangiia Puna, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your good work with our vulnerable people in our village. To our Puna Chairman, Ina Tararo and your Executives – thank you. To all the three Pu Tapaere of Turangi, Avana and Muri – thank you for your support. To Keta Williams and landowners, thank you for letting the village Puna operate from the Muri meeting houses.

To all our youth of Ngatangiia and all the drivers around Rarotonga and the Cook Islands, don't drink and drive, stay safe. To all our people listening in from overseas, also please stay safe.

To my Ngatangiia Democratic Party Executives and supporters, thank you very much. To More Amoa and Mauri who have steered our Vaka on the right path and for trusting me to be the MP for Ngatangiia, Merry Christmas to you all.

To my dear wife, Lynn and our two children Avarii and Teariki, thank you for sticking by me through the good and the bad.

I also want to greet the former Queen's Representative, my brother in law, Sir Frederick Goodwin and his good wife, my sister Lady Goodwin and to my other sisters who are very sick in New Zealand which is Mama Ella Toa and Jane Tuavera plus to all my families in Aotearoa, Australia and around the globe.

In respect to all our brothers and sisters of Ngati Tumutauenga who have marched off for the last time – *“Aere, aere atu e te toa a Tumutevarovaro.”*

To the Government, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and to all the Ministers and Members of Parliament, to the Opposition Leader, Honourable Tina Browne and all the Opposition Members of Parliament, to you Madam Speaker and your family and also to all your staff – Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.



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

**HON. G. ANGENE:** Madam Speaker, I stand to give my greetings to you and all your staff first because we are always congregating together in this House from the beginning of the year. Thank you to all of you for looking after us during this year and for all the good food that you feed us. Merry Christmas to you all. It is kind of out of tune to greet you this way because Christmas is a long way ahead of us.

I give my greetings to the people in my constituency of Tupapa-nui-o-Au. Those who are honoured with title and all the people – Kia Orana. Greeting to the new Vakatini Ariki and all your Rangatira and people. I will be brief in my speech here Madam Speaker.

To all my Committee that are preparing for the cyclone season we have a meeting tonight. You know the secret venue for this meeting so come and we will discuss what we are planning for Tupapa and all our people living in Rarotonga.

That is my greetings to my people of Tupapa, Kia Orana.

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

**MRS S. NAPA:** Greetings to the people in my village of Teimurimotia Titikaveka. Firstly, to the Aronga Mana, Kia Orana. To all the different denominations in Teimurimotia, Kia Orana. To all the elderlies to the newly born, Kia Orana. To the business community, Kia Orana. To the sports people in my village, Kia Orana to you.

A special mention to our foreign sons and daughters of Teimurimotia, Kia Orana. The various colleges who will be holding their price giving soon, Kia Orana. We lost loved ones in our village and my heartfelt condolences goes out to the families. Your hurt was also all of ours in the village. A special one goes out to my Ngati Raina family, to Raina Mataiapo and your people – thank you for holding the family together.

To my husband, Shane and family, thank you for your support. To Ali Macquarie and the Fire boys, the staff of our Health Centre – thank you for your commitment to saving lives and for delivering water to those in need and for putting our peoples' lives first. To our one and only single-handed security officer, Big J whom we see on the road day and night, every day – thank you for your commitment.

To the Vaimaanga Security Neighbourhood Watch, keep on doing the good work. A special mention to our prayer warriors in our village, your prayers will continue to impact our village to pray for Gods precious blood to cover us all in our village and our nation with his unconditional love.

A special mention to our new Teimurimotia Village Council under the leadership of Sonny, may you reign over Teimurimotia in harmony and peace and working together for the wellbeing of our people. Thank you to ICI, Diana and Sonny and the team for the work that was done on our main roads infrastructure and drainage and everything else that ICI have done for us. You must have heard an ear full from me but I thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you have done for our village.

To Landholdings for the fish that you have delivered for our old people, thank you for that. To our youth, please be safe on the road. Let us have a happy Christmas and let not our celebrations be marred by tragic events.

This is our first Parliament session since the Cook Islands Games. The spirit that was generated during the Games is one that should be continued into the new year. May the Christmas and love keep our country COVID-19 free.

From myself and my husband, Shane, I give you all our Christmas greetings. *“Psalm 127: Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain”*. To us all, may we build our faith unto our God to protect our country and people – Kia Orana.

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

**HON. P. ARIOKA:** Madam Speaker, Kia Orana to all our people. To the three pillars of our nation, I convey greetings to you all for being the leaders of our nation, Kia Orana to you all.

My sympathies to the families that have lost loved ones at this time. This is my family, to my nephew that have passed away. To the family of Papa Tapi Taio, may God comfort us all during this time of bereavement. I convey the condolences of myself and my wife to all the families that are mourning for the loss of their loved ones throughout nation.

To Tinomana Ariki, Kaumaiti Nui and Kaumaiti Iti, the Ui Ariki, Aronga Mana, Ui Mataiapo, Ui Rangatira from Tu-Oro to Toro-a-Iva in Puaikura, Kia Orana to you all. I am encouraging you and also acknowledging your support for the work that we have done in the past years and we have lived peacefully together and looking forward to the future.

To the Mataiapo Tokoitu in my constituency of Murienua, thank you for supporting your Member of Parliament so he can do his work as he has promised for the benefit of the people in Murienua. Greetings to the Christian fellowships and your prayers for us Members of Parliament in this Honourable House so we can make the right decisions for our country.

To the people in my constituency, my active Committee, the two Patrons, the Chairman and the Youth, a very big thank you for your support as we have this year overcome some hurdles through working together for the benefit of our people. This is the spirit that we have achieved. To the Puna volunteers, our coordinator Mama Pokotiao Henry and the workers, a very big thank you for serving our people. To our elder’s right down to the young ones, to the youth looking after the elderly, we have to hold onto the teachings of the village, the land and our country, Kia Orana tyo you all.

Lastly, I would like to convey my acknowledgment to the teachers of Rutaki School because I have been teaching at Rutaki School the whole year on agriculture. So, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of us from myself and my wife and family. Kia Orana and Kia Manuia.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Honourable William Heather.

**MR W. HEATHER:** Kia Orana to all of us in the House today. Kia Orana to you Madam Speaker, your staff and all of us Members of Parliament.

I want to extend my greetings to the people in the Outer Islands as I am from various islands so accept my Season Greetings wherever you maybe. To Papa Rito in Pukapuka, yes Tingika is coming over and give some encouragement to Tingika and look after him. To my relatives in Mauke, Mitiaro and Atiu, God bless. To the people in Mangaia, Aitutaki and Palmerston, God bless.

To the Kaumaiti Nui and the Kaumaiti Iti, because these two Ariki are from my constituency, Season Greetings to you two and your families. To the Ui Mataiapo and Ui Rangatira from Tuoro to Toreaiwa, may the love of the Lord be amongst us. To those who are clouded by bereavements in our constituency, may the love of the Lord be with you during this times. To the patients in hospital especially the elderly who are fatigued and frail, I send Season Greetings to you all.

To my energetic Committee in Ruaau, the Independent, the CIP and the United Party, my Season Greetings to you all and your leaders. I offer my encouragement to you all as we are all from the same family. God bless us all as we go through the festive season.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, and I see the Honourable Albert Nicholas.

**MR A. NICHOLAS:** Madam Speaker, thank very much. Madam Speaker and your very hard working staff of this Honourable House, fellow colleagues from the centre left to the centre right, I wish you all the best for the festive season. Keep safe and stay off the food otherwise you will start looking like this.

Madam Speaker, to the people in my constituency of RAPPa, to my people from the eldest to the youngest, those holding various titles in the villages in relation to the church, land and Government, to those in sports and all those in RAPPa, my Season Greetings to you all for the festive season we are about to enter.

I will end it here because in the coming weeks I will be visiting the elderlies to deliver some Christmas presents in the likes of cartons of chicken. Just wishing everyone a very Merry safe Christmas Madam Speaker and I will leave it at that. Other than that, it has been an enjoyable year with you Parliamentarians, a very interesting year with COVID but I am wishing everyone a very safe and Merry Christmas. Thank you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you. I see the Honourable Nooroa Baker.

**MR N. BAKER:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Firstly, you know I am a person of a few words but an action man. Madam Speaker and your staff thank you for the work you are doing for our people. May the Lord bless you all. To our new Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers, new Minister Patrick Arioka, may the Lord help you as you work for our people. To our Leader and Members on our side, may the Lord also help us in doing our work for our people. To all your families, may the Lord expand on what you have.

A special acknowledgment to former Member of Parliament, Tapi Taio who is going through this time of bereavement. May the Lord give you, your wife and family strength and warmth during this time. I will not mention names, however to everyone in my constituency Akaoa, to those who helped and supported me during the years we came through, a very big Season Greetings to you all. To my working Committee, Chairman and those who helped me, the title holders in the Churches, businesses in my constituency, my Season Greetings to you all. Thank you for the work you have done in our village to look after our people. To all of the people of Puaikura, may the Lord bless us all so we can work together for the benefit of our people as we go through these times.

So, to our youth be cautious where you go because this is a time we celebrate as we gets closer to the festive season. Abide with the road rules and also do not drink to be intoxicated. May the Lord look after us this festive season and for us to live peacefully. Thank you very much.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you. I see the Honourable Tereapii Maki Kavana.

**MR T. KAVANA:** To the Speaker of the House, thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak in this Honourable House.

To open my speech, firstly, I want to address our new Prime Minister but I have a verse to bring to you Prime Minister. *Isiah 41:10 says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"*. This is your Cook Islands Party family from Araura Enea extending their love to you and for you to lead our country at this time.

Now, I am extending greetings and good wishes from the people of my constituency Arutanga/Reureu/Nikaupara to all the Honourable Members of this House because you have approved some funding which enabled my constituency to get some projects completed for the benefit of my people.

Now, I want to give my personal greetings to the people of my constituency, the Ministers of the Religious Organisations, I give you my greetings. There are six Religious Organisations in my constituency, may God bless you all and together with your congregation. I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you for all your prayers.

Secondly, to all the Ui Ariki, there are only two Ariki in my constituency of Reureu that have been confirmed according to Maori custom and they are, Teurukura Ariki Tane and Teurukura Ariki Vaine, Papa Makirau Haurua. Kia Orana to you my Ariki and also Kia Orana to my Ariki Vaine, Mama Jill as you two are now holding this high title in our village.

There is talk circulating that a new Tamatoa has been elected to hold this title. I want to tell this House that on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April next year, the ceremony to bestow the title on our new Tamatoa Ariki, Papa Teao Tangaroa will be held. If you are hearing something else, well it's like that these days but my prayer is that we will only have one Ariki. May God give us the strength to carry out this big task when the time comes.

I give my greetings to the many different groups like the Youth Organisations, the Women's Groups and the Children's groups, Merry Christmas to all of you. I also want to mention the Task Force and I can see on Facebook that this Group has been established only in my area of Arenikau. Thank you for the good work that you are carrying out to look after our village of Arenikau.

I want to give Christmas greetings to my hard working Committee for supporting our work and for helping me during the past two years and we can see there are two more years to go. I want to say thank you to my Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Treasurer, the Secretary, the Committee Members and all my supporters. At this very moment in my constituency, they are all my supporters so I thank all my people from the elderly to the young children. Like what my friend from RAAPA is saying, in the future I will be visiting your homes to share cartons of chicken not to some people only but every home in the constituency. Since I became their Member of Parliament, I visit their homes during the Christmas and New Year period. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of you in my constituency.

I want to give greetings to my wife, and I believe she is watching me on Facebook. Greetings to you my wife and we will meet soon. God Bless all the Members of Parliament, all the people of the Cook Islands watching me on Facebook and listening on radio, Kia Orana to all of you and until we meet again in this House in 2021, may God Bless you all.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, and I see the Honourable Agnes Armstrong.

**MRS A. ARMSTRONG:** Thank you Madam Speaker. I would like to pass on my Christmas greeting to yourself and your family, all the staff of the House, the Members of Parliament and their families, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

I would also like to extend my greetings to my village of Ivirua and my people in Ivirua. From our Kavana to our Rangatira, to the Council Members and all the different denominations the Ministers in our village, Kia Orana to you all.

As your Member of Parliament, I am humbled and thank you all for your support in this past year. I am grateful for the unity in our village, Ivirua Community and how we have come together to make our Tapere a better place to live. It is my priority to work with each and every one of you closely and I look forward to 2021 where I can represent you again in this House. I would like to make the spirit of Christmas and its significance to the world be with you all throughout this time. May the festive season bring us all together and the spirit of love, happiness, friendship and family, have a safe and joyous festive season.

To our Ariki Numangatini and his family and to the rest of the people of Mangaia, my people may you all have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. My family and I wish you all the very best of health, happiness and prosperity for the New Year and may you realise your hopes and aspirations for 2021. To everyone else, be safe, love one another and be kind. God Bless you all.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you. I see the Honourable Tai Tura, you have the Floor.

**MR T. TURA:** Thank you Madam Speaker. I extend my Christmas greetings to you and your family and also to our staff at Parliament and their families. May God Bless you all during this Christmas period. To all the Members of Parliament both on the Government side and the Opposition, my wife, my family and I give our words of greetings to you all, and may God bless us during this period when we remember the birth of our Lord.

To the people of Akatokamanava, greetings. To the Ui Ariki and the three branches, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord. To the different Religious Denominations on the island, the Church Ministers, may God bless us all.

To the Mayor of the Island, the Council Members, public servants, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. To our elderly citizens on the island, the youth, our children, may God bless you all.

I will be travelling back to Mauke and we will be holding a Christmas in the Park function and I will greet you all individually during that time. For the moment, my wife, my family and I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. God Bless you all, Kia Orana.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** That's great, thank you. I see the Honourable Manuela Kitai.

**MR M. KITAI:** Greetings to all of us this afternoon. Greetings to you Madam Speaker and your staff, Merry Christmas to you all and a Happy New Year. To all of us in this Parliament House, the Prime Minister, your Deputy, all Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament and our retired Prime Minister, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord.

Kia Orana to Araura Enuā. The three sectors that we usually refer to, Kia Orana to you in the Name of our Lord. To our Papa Mayor, your Council Members and your families, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord. To the Executive Officer and all the public servants, greetings in the name of our Lord.

Kia Orana to the people in my constituency, Vaipeka/Vaipae/Tautu, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord, I greet all of you the old and the young, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord. Special greetings to Mama Amiria Davey who went through bereavement in the past couple of weeks, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord.

Greetings to my hard working Committee from the Chairman and everyone, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord. I trust we will meet at our wrap up maybe next week. This is not just for the Democratic supporters but for all the people of Ngavaitau. I trust your items are ready. Vaipeka Village will entertain during the Christmas period and for the New Year it will be Vaipae's turn. If you want to join, come and bring some donations for Vaipae and Vaipeka.

I wish to give special greetings to my wife who have supported me not only in the good times but also when it has not been smooth sailing. I thank God for your support. So my wife joins me in wishing you all a Merry Christmas and may God bless us all. Kia Orana.

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

**MRS T. MATAPO:** To begin my Christmas greetings the Psalm says, I will lift up my eyes onto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help comes from the Lord who created heaven and earth.

Kia Orana to all of us today. To all the staff of Parliament, from the Head to the last employee, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

I wish to send my greetings to the island of Mangaia. Kia Orana to Numangatini Ariki as I believe this is your first Christmas on this position, so Kia Orana to you during this Christmas and New Year.

To the leaders of the Island Government, Papa Mayor, the EO, all public servants, I wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I thank you for all the work that you have done for the benefit of our island and our people.

To Nga Ngauru of Tamarua, Papa Orometua Aravei Williams, Mama Orometua Akauta and family, I wish you all the best for Christmas and New Year. To the Assistant Minister, Papa Tearapiri Teaurima and Mama Tauturu and all the congregation, I give my Christmas and New Year greetings to you all. To all our children, the Youth and our Special Needs children, I give greetings to you all.

To all the public servants of Tamarua, the Government Representative, the Council Member, all workers helping to do the work in the village, I give thanks to you all for doing the work in the village and on the island.

Thank you also to the Minister of ICI and Mama Diane, this girl is from Tamarua anyway so I give a big thank you from the people to you for the work that has been done in the village. The work is not really complete but I believe it will be completed someday.

I give Christmas and New Year greetings to the Aronga Mana of the village, the elderly, the people who have returned from overseas and those who have left the island, I give thanks and Christmas and New Year greetings to you all.

I also want to give thanks to the people of Tamarua, Mangaia who live on the island of Rarotonga and also those living overseas for all the help and support you have given to our village and our island in the past days and years. I wish you all the best for Christmas and New Year.

I also want to thank all the people who looked after us when we come to this island of Rarotonga. Thank you Mama Marie Glassie Tearoa, Kia Orana and good luck during this time.

Lastly, I want to greet my Love on the island. I am sure people are wanting him to go fishing for pipi. So I give thanks to my husband and all my family living on Mangaia because we are all one family on Mangaia. So may God bless us and guide us during this time that we are hearing about the COVID virus and may God bless us during the Christmas and New Year season. God Bless.

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

**HON. R. TOKI-BROWN:** Firstly, I want to thank God for looking after and protecting our country and our people from the beginning of this year and we are nearly at the end of this year 2020. All public servants employed by our Government, from our Leader, the Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Ministers, the Leader who have just retired and all of us who have worked with our Members of Parliament in the Opposition and all of us who have worked together through the guidance of our leaders in our work place to try and find ways to protect our country from this virus, may God be praised for your cooperation.

Yes, I accept your suggestions that we should always work together. This should be the paramount thought that we should always protect our country.

I stand to give greetings from my Constituency and also that of the Honourable Member Tehani Brown. They cannot hear the radio but that is not a problem because we will be coming to the island in the near future to give greetings to the people on the island. I give greetings to all the people who live on the red soil of Enuamanu and also to the people living on Tumutevarovaro and all around the Outer Islands. To those of you watching the livestream, I give greetings to all of you.

To all of us Honourable Members, our Speaker, all the staff of this Honourable House, all our families who will be celebrating Christmas and the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ, may the blessing of our Lord be with us to keep and protect us all.

To all the people who will be travelling to Enuamanu, the delegation that will arrive for the occasion of Te Marae Moana, may the blessing of the Lord be with us to protect us.

To the people who are working hard under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Works and your workers living on the island finishing off the work on the road, may God give you and your workers His blessing.

There are many others giving help to our island, the people of Enuamanu give their big thank you to you and also the three Pillars on the island give their thanks from our Ui Ariki, Ui Rangatira, their tribes, the Religious Sector and I thank you for praying for our Nation because under the guidance of the Lord, we can see the many benefits.

We are going through the cyclone season now and we have had a special service to ask our Lord to guide us and we must put our trust in what we believe that our Lord is our main guide for our Nation. May God's blessing be amongst us. From both Members of Parliament of Enuamanu, the people of Enuamanu and my husband and our family, I wish you all Kia Orana and Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to us all. God Bless.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you. I see the Honourable Minister, Vaine Mokoroa.

**HON. V. MOKOROA:** Thank you Madam Speaker. Let me start by quoting, *James 1:17* "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of light with whom there is no variableness neither shadow or turning."



There are two key observation when one reads this verse. Firstly, it is the act of giving and the type of gift, and secondly, one receives and one has to determine which gift is good and which gift is perfect.

Kia Orana to both sides of the House. Madam Speaker, Acting Clerk and staff, Interpreters, Kia Orana and thank you for the work that we have done this year. To the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Tina Browne, Deputy Leader and Members within the Opposition, Kia Orana and thank you for all the work that we have done in this House and all the work that we have done as Select Committees that we have travelled all around in the Outer Islands.

On our side let me say, Kia Orana and say thank you to the new Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and also thank you to the former Prime Minister, Honourable Henry Puna and all Members within this Government.

Kia Orana to all of us listening in to this session. To all our people living in the Outer Islands and those watching online, Kia Orana and thank you for watching us.

Now, let me take this opportunity to convey my Christmas and festive greetings to the capital of Rarotonga, Oire Nikao. Kia Orana to all those listening in to our Parliament this afternoon from Tapere Pokoinu in the west all the way to Rangiura. To the Aronga Mana, Ui Rangatira, Ui Mataiapo living in the village of Nikao, Kia Orana.

To our Papa Orometua, Oirua Rasmussen your good wife and family and the Nikao congregation, the Assistant Minister, Papa Vai Peua and your good wife, Elders, Deacons, the Uniform Organisations and all those holding different titles, Kia Orana. A special thank you to our Papa Orometua and Papa Vai Peua who sometimes comes to our Parliament to deliver our devotions on all the Sitting days of our Parliament.

To other denominations within Nikao, Kia Orana in the Good Name of our Lord. To all our elderlies, youth and newly born babies living within Nikao, Kia Orana.

To all the Government public servants, business owners living in Nikao, Kia Orana to all of you. As we come to the end of another active, challenging and indeed rewarding year, we give thanks to the Good Lord for His never ending faith and guidance in the path that we have travelled in and ask that He continues to guide us in our future path.

Madam Speaker, this week I am overwhelmed and humbled to announce in this very House and to the people listening in to our broadcasting that the Prime Minister through the Executive Council have tabled in this House today an Order for an increase of the infirmity benefit for our people collecting the welfare benefit. This means that our people collecting the infirmity benefits will be collecting instead of \$200 per month will now be collecting \$400 per month effective as of the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

I would also like to remind our people and our welfare beneficiaries that they would receive and added bonus of \$50 for our elderlies, child benefits, our destitute and care givers. Again, I thank the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers for their ongoing support as well as hard working staff of the Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Finance for the work that they have done in putting these two increase and support for our people in this Christmas period for something to help them go by.

I would like to thank the staff within the Ministry of Education, Ombudsman and Internal Affairs. I take this opportunity to wish all staff and their families a very Merry Christmas and safe festive period. My wife and family would also like to wish all of us here, those listening on the radio and more so those living in the village of Nikao a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year, Kia Orana.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much. Look, I don't look forward to cutting this short but there is one, two, three, four, five people who have not spoken. Our Motion finishes the session today at 4.00 p.m.

**MR H. PUNA:** I will try and get out of the way Madam Speaker before time runs out.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Could you shorten your speeches a bit more.

**MR H. PUNA:** Indeed.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Go ahead, we are wasting time, please I see the Honourable Henry Puna.

**MR H. PUNA:** I have two minutes. Madam Speaker I greet all our people first – the beautiful people of the Cook Islands. I thank you for your strong support during my time as the Prime Minister of our nation and the outpouring of support has been very warming.

I also thank the people of Araura Enuu for the special tribute they have granted me and my wife when we visited the island in October. Also to my people of Manihiki for their special programme which was held at the Dome just recently, that was really very moving but it was nice and very humbling to know that there is support and love from your constituency who you represent in this House. So, I thank God for that kind of spirit found in you.

This year has been a big year for us for the Cook Islands. Not only have we had to face COVID-19 and overcome it or at least keep it away from our borders but we've also been blessed in so many ways. It is a pity that our graduation to high income status was marred by COVID-19 but I have every confidence Madam Speaker that this little paradise will recover and recover fast once we are over this COVID-19 pandemic.

But the good news is that the vaccines are on the way and I am pleased that Australia has already made arrangements for us to be part of their access to the Oxford vaccine which we have heard is so far the best that have come out and we look forward to receiving those from Australia.

To my Manihiki people living on our island, Kia Orana to you all in the Name of the Lord. I will not prolong my greetings because we will meet in person this coming Monday. I am coming over with my wife and after a week on the 9<sup>th</sup> December, the High Commissioner of Australia will be landing on our island. He is very happy that he will be the first High Commissioner of Australia to visit Manihiki. I am sure there will be many projects to benefit our island from Australia. Hopefully there are some left after Mangaia.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank all the Honourable Members of this House. To me there has been an improvement in our behaviour in this House. There have been times when we have disagreed but that has not been a problem to affect our relationships. I believe respect for one another is very important in this Honourable House. After all, we are the representatives of our people and we need to show respect in that way.

I don't know what the future holds Madam Speaker. If I am still here next year or if this intention will be successful for the position in Fiji. Maybe if the Opposition supported it then we would be lucky. Maybe next year there will be a new spirit and they will support it. But I just want to explain about the taking turn of the Secretary General position. That went out the window in 2002 in Wellington when the forum meeting was held there.

John Howard, the Prime Minister of Australia, demanded that an Australian official be appointed as the Secretary General and he was successful. But the leaders at the time decided against that proposal of rotation. Whoever is the best candidate in the views of the leaders for the job, according to the circumstances and the needs of the Pacific at the time would be appointed by the leaders. So that is the new rule.

Madam Speaker, we the Members who are going back to our constituency are very lucky. I want to convey my greetings and best wishes to all of us in this House and to all our people. May God Bless us all, my favourite scripture is found in *Proverbs 3:5-6* "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will direct your path."

May the Good Lord Bless us all. May we have a safe Christmas and a Happy New Year with our families and communities. Kia Orana.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you very much. I see the Honourable Prime Minister.

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker, in view of the time. I move:

**That Standing Order 54(3) be suspended to enable Members to convey their Christmas greetings to their constituencies and the Nation**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you are we still sticking with the five minutes speech?

**HON. M. BROWN:** Five minutes Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Five minutes, alright. There is a Motion on the Floor, and I seek a Secunder.

**Seconded by the Honourable Wesley Kareroa**

I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

You Honourable Member may take the Floor and for 5 minutes.

**MR W. KAREROA:** Madam Speaker, greetings to you and our Interpreters, all your hard working staff, our livestreaming camera men and our ladies preparing our meals, God Bless you all.

Kia Orana to our new Prime Minister and his Deputy Prime Minister, I believe both of you are Mangaia descendants but the future will reveal whether that is a fact. I also acknowledge our former Prime Minister and congratulate our new Minister the Honourable Patrick Arioka. I would like to encourage you in this new role in Government that you are undertaking.

I greet all the Honourable Members in Government and also the Members on our side of the Opposition and to our Leader, Kia Orana to you all.

The most important place for me to convey my greetings on my island will not be hearing my voice because there is no radio broadcast but I will still pass my greetings to them. First of all, I greet the new Ariki of Mangaia, Numangatini Ariki. I believe you are still in Rarotonga. You will be returning to Mangaia in the next few days, please convey my greetings to our people.

Greetings to our EO in Mangaia and to all your public servants and to our new Mayor. I encourage the two of you to continue your good work for our island. I also want to acknowledge the Aronga Mana and the Councillors who are working hard, I give my greetings to you all.

I especially want to acknowledge my hard working Committee from the Village of Oneroa and also all the people residing in Oneroa. I extend my Christmas Greetings to you all. On my return in the next few days, maybe I will have some cartons of chicken that will be shared for the people of the village. This is a Christmas gift from me and not to buy votes from you. I always like this quote from, *1 Corinthians 13:13 These three remain; faith, hope, and love: and the greatest of these is love.*

God bless you all. Thank you.

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

**MR T. MAOATE:** Madam Speaker, to you and all your staff, I wish to thank you all for the work that you have done during this year and also the Select Committee work, so Merry Christmas to you all.

To all the Honourable Members of the House, the Government side the Prime Minister, all Cabinet Ministers, the previous Prime Minister who has been honoured by the people of Aitutaki, Kia Orana and Merry Christmas to you all.

To our Members in the Opposition and to our Leader, enjoy the festive season and have a safe Christmas.

To the people of Araura Enuā who may be listening to the radio or watching the livestream, I send my greetings to all of you. To the Mayor, the Council Members and all the people of Aitutaki, greetings. To the Religious Organisation, please be strong and get your good message across to the people.

To our Ui Ariki, the two new Ariki that have been elected and I believe another Ariki will be given a title next week, but the Member for Arenikau earlier said that the title will be bestowed in April, anyway, I give my greetings to all the Aronga Mana of Aitutaki.

To my people of Amuri/Ureia, I give special greetings to the Council Member Papa Terepoto of Amuri and Papa Tangi and your family. To the Chairman of the Village and your Committee Members, greetings.

To Vaeruarangi Rangi, Ui Mataiapo and all the Aronga Mana, Kia Orana to you all. To the different Religious Denominations in the Village, the elderly parents and the Youth, Kia Orana to all of you.

During this festive season please be careful and make sure that no accidents occur. Please ask the children to be careful so we can all enjoy the Christmas holidays.

I want to thank my Chairman, Papa Natini Samuela and his wife and all the Committee Members, the supporters and my family for their continued support in what I am doing for our village and our island of Aitutaki.

During this period of the COVID, we started an agriculture programme and many people know about this but I want to thank the workers of the Council, the Government of the day for your help and support to the private sector and the stimulus package and I hope this can be continued for the good of our people.

We are now preparing for the 200th Anniversary of the arrival of the Gospel to our island and I believe the Government will give some support for this project, so I thank the Government for giving their support.

I want to give a message to all of our people to please be safe. To our English speaking friends, just a Christmas message to have an enjoyable, safe and a happy Merry Christmas. I wish all of us in this House a Merry Christmas and all over the globe. Thank you.

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

**HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE:** Kia Orana to all of us in the Name of our Lord. To you Speaker and all your staff in this Parliament, Kia Orana.

Sometimes we forget to acknowledge the staff who does our transcribing work, the Hansard staff, our two Interpreters, the two women working in the kitchen who looked after us this year with the food, greetings to you all. I complained during the lunch hour because this is the first time that we did not have pork but I was told that we will have pork on the menu this afternoon. So thank you very much and I want to send Christmas

Greetings to all of you and all of us. To your families as well, this is a festive time and a time for us to celebrate during Christmas.

I want to take a short time, and I say short because we will be flying to the Northern Group next week so I will spend some time in Rakahanga. Anyway, I would like to give greetings to the Mayor, to Neti, your wife and your family, to all the Government workers, our Acting Executive Officer, your family, the three Religious Groups on the island, to all the leaders, our Papa Government Representative who is our elder on the island, Papa Temu Hagai, Kia Orana to you all.

To all the different organisations on the island and our elderly people, our children and all of us, greetings. We all know that our Executive Officer have been referred to New Zealand and we send our good wishes to him and wish him well during this time and hope to see him back in Rarotonga and return to Rakahanga. To all the patients who have been referred to New Zealand, I send my get well message to you all.

I want to give special greetings to the President of the Rakahanga Community and the Executives in Rarotonga. Thank you for looking after our Rakahanga Group during the time of the Cook Islands Games. We all know that Rakahanga won the Outer Islands apart from the Southern Group. Manihiki lost to Rakahanga, Pukapuka lost to Rakahanga and Penryhn lost to Rakahanga.

So I want to give special greetings to the President of the Rakahanga Island on Rarotonga for helping to look after our Team Rakahanga during the Cook Islands Games. I also wish to send greetings to the Sports Association on the island of Rakahanga for also helping our Team Rakahanga during the time of the Cook Islands Games, thank you very much.

I want to also send special greetings to the Principal of the School, to the teachers and also the Parent Teachers Association for the hard work you did in the past year to get a new sign for the school and also to build the toilet block for the Pre School children within the school. I want to say thank you to all of you.

To all the people listening to the radio on Rarotonga and also in the Pa Enea, I want to send my greetings and also that of my husband and our children and also greetings from the Democratic Party to all of you. This is a time for togetherness with no politics. I think we should pass a law that during December and January that we do not talk Party but talk of being together as one people.

Yes, I agree with what the former Prime Minister said that we have improved slightly, the Members in this Parliament have enough respect for each other now and we do not interrupt a Member and we are getting more civilised. It is only right that we should respect each other during this time of Christmas and I wish us all, that side, this side, this side a very Merry Christmas and a very prosperous New Year. Thank you, Kia Orana e Kia Manuia.

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

**HON. M. BROWN:** Thank you Madam Speaker. As the last speaker of this House, let me extend even though Christmas is four weeks away for our last Sitting in the House before the end of the year, let me extend a warm Christmas greetings to you, the staff of the House, all the Members of Parliament that are here today and everybody that's listening in on radio, watching online and all of us for this period of Christmas and New Year for us to be happy.

I know I will be coming on TV to present a Christmas Greeting as we do each year as the Leader and the Leaders of our country, so there will be an opportunity also to provide Christmas Greetings to our people then.

To my constituency of Takuvaine and Tutakimoa, I give greetings to all of you listening to our radio today. I will be coming to visit you in our Tapere in the near future at this time of Christmas and New Year.

I am really pleased, Madam Speaker at this time that we have come through a whole year with this COVID intact as a country. Certainly not unharmed, we have been hit with the economy and the state of it but I think the way that our country has managed to stay strong, how we have managed to support our households, our businesses, I think it's a credit to everybody that's been involved and a credit to our people as well where they did remain strong. There was nobody who was complaining or moaning. In fact, what I received was a lot of gratitude from our people, particularly when we go to the Outer Islands with the support that we have provided as a country to our people. Something for all Members in this House to be very happy with, proud of and look forward to the New Year bringing us much better blessings than we have had this year.

But there is, as mentioned by some of our Members, hope for us for the new year that this virus will be contained, that the vaccine will be available and that we can start looking at some sense of normality coming to our country and coming to the rest of the world. We are so fortunate that we are living in our part of the world, relatively unscathed and in a paradise compared to some of the other countries that we see on television being ravaged by the COVID-19. So we can only count our blessings and give our thanks to the Good Lord for the protection that he has given to us. So with those words Madam Speaker, I wish all of us a very good Christmas, enjoy our evening here and may the Good Lord bring all of us back to this House when it is called again safe, sound, in one piece and in sound mind as well. So thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Yes, thank you very much. I do not have a constituency because you are my constituency and so, on your behalf, there are a few people we need to recognise. But on your behalf, there are some people we would like to thank because without them our job would not be complete.

First of all, I want to extend our many thanks to the Queen's Representative, Sir Tom Marsters because after we finish our work in here, the Bills go to him and he has to assent them before they become Legislation. And of course, to call you all to come to the meeting, he does that in summoning you. So on your behalf and of Parliament, I recognise his role in our work.

I also want to recognise our other arm of governance the Justice Department, and of course for you as the Executive who are here in this House as part of the work of Parliament.

The other group I'd like to recognise is the Ministry of Culture. When you look around you, we would not be able to take our work to the community without the Ministry of Culture coming to help us to get that across. So I extend our thanks on your behalf and myself to them.

I want to recognise the work we are supported with, the Minister Robert Tapaitau who is the Minister for the Ministry of Infrastructure and who supports our Interpreters and our Translators to work for us during Parliament sitting, especially Sonny who is with us today. The Ministries themselves who produce the Bills for you to be able to come here to do that work, which is really important. Without them producing this to come to us.

Then there is our Crown Law Office, it is really important for us to recognise the work of Crown Law in producing the Bills for us to be brought here.

I want to recognise the Australia High Commissioner. We have worked very closely because of our twining partner Western Australia and we are liaising with him very closely while he is here.

Then there's the New Zealand High Commissioner. We are working with them all the time with New Zealand being a big support for the work that the Parliament does.

Let me also say the UNDP, you will notice next year that we will have some really good equipment to hold our own in doing virtual meetings and things like that. So that's been an excellent partnership we've had with UNDP.

There is also the CPA. The CPA gives us a lot of support as well with our being a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Then CIIC, we have done a lot of work with CIIC in the last few months in fixing up our property.

Then, finally I want to say that the staff of Parliament has been busy. They have worked really well and I want to congratulate all the staff of Parliament for the work that they have produced in the year because I want to share some information with you.

However, before that, I would like to bring to this House, I do not know if you are aware but our own staff Kimiora Vogel is in the hospital in New Zealand and Kimi and Felix Matapuku are there. Kimi just had her surgery a few days ago and I am really happy to tell you that she is recovering and she is better than she was. Therefore, we have missed Kimi in doing our interpreting here but she is close to us. We keep in contact with her.

So let me just say that it's been a really unusual year as we all know. You've all talked about that but not only with the pandemic, we've had an unusual year in the former Prime Minister resigning and then we have a new Prime Minister and then we've lost



a Prime Minister just recently. So that's been a significant inclusion of Parliament with those three major things happening.

I wanted to tell you that we've passed 23 new Legislations in 22 Sitting days this year, since we started in March so I think you need to pat yourselves on the back and say you have done some good work with that. Because we have a lot of you travelling, Minister Tapaitau will be travelling to Penrhyn, the Leader of the House and the former Prime Minister Henry Puna will also be travelling, Minister Vaine Mokoroa and Member Tehani Brown will be going to an Internal Affairs trip to Manihiki and quite a few and of course we didn't say farewell to the Honourable Member Elikana who left today to catch his boat to go to Pukapuka.

So with all that, on behalf of Parliament today and engaging with the Prime Minister and with the Minister of Parliament, we would like to invite you to dinner at Parliament tonight and have a cup of coffee or a glass of water and as our way of saying thank you very much for the good work done. For Colin and I, we would also like to wish you a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and all the staff of Parliament would like to do the same in wishing you all the best for the festive season.

So with that, we are coming to the last Motion of the day, if I can ask the Prime Minister to please present that.

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

**That this Parliament adjourn *Sine Die***

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Is there a Secunder for the Motion?

**Secinded by the Honourable Tai Tura**

I put the Question:

**That the Motion be agreed to?**

**Motion agreed to**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** As we are coming to our closing prayer, one person I did not mention which is circled on my paper is of course our Chaplain, so may I ask the Chaplain to close our meeting tonight please.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Parliament is adjourned *Sine Die*.

**Sitting adjourned at 4.24 p.m.**