

DISCLAIMER

This Report provides a brief of the Proceedings of Parliament on **Tuesday 23 January 2024**. While all efforts have been made to provide an informative brief, this information must not be relied upon as an alternative to the official Hansard record of proceedings of Parliament. If you have any specific questions about the Proceedings of Parliament on **Tuesday 23 January 2024**, you should consult the official Hansard or seek assistance from the Office of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

Day 1

9:32am

I. GREETINGS FROM MR SPEAKER

The Hon Speaker greeted and welcomed all Members and Government officials present in the House as well as to all Samoans listening in to the first Parliament Sitting for 2024. Mr Speaker then acknowledged all Samoans and the diaspora community for their continuous prayers and support then wished Parliament well with its proceedings this year and sought the guidance from God to lead and guide the works of Parliament this year.

II. PRESENTATION OF PAPERS

The Clerk read out a total of 10 Government Responses tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

III. PRESENTATION OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Clerk read out a total of 6 Committee Reports tabled:

- 1 Report - Standing Orders, Electoral, Petitions and Constitutional Offices Committee.
- 1 Report - Economic Sector Committee.
- 4 Reports - Finance and Expenditure Committee.

IV. MOTIONS FROM PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON:

i. Parliamentary Commission

Afioga AUUAPAAU Mulipola Aloitafua Mulipola – Deputy Chairperson for the Parliamentary Commission, moved a motion that the Assembly approve Parliament’s Sitting Calendar 2024/2025 as recommended by the Parliamentary Commission:

- Tuesday 5th March

- Tuesday 28th May
- Tuesday 18th June
- Tuesday 20th August
- Tuesday 24th December
- Tuesday 21st January 2025

Motion seconded by Minister for MCIL and Member for Vaisigano 1; Motion approved.

ii. Standing Orders, Electoral, Petitions and Constitutional Offices Committee

The Chairperson for the Committee, Afioga AUUAPAAU Mulipola Aloitafula Mulipola moved a motion pursuant to S.O 166(2), for an extension of time for the Committee to complete its deliberations on 4 reports:

- i. P.P. 2023/2024, No. 39
- ii. P.P. 2023/2024, No. 40
- iii. P.P. 2023/2024, No. 42
- iv. P.P. 2023/2024, No. 48

Motion seconded by the Members for Gagaifomauga No.2 and Vaisigano No.1; Motion Approved

ii. Finance and Expenditure Committee

The Chairperson of the Committee, Afioga FALEOMAVAEGA Titimaea Tafua moved a motion pursuant to S.O 166(2) for an extension of time, to allow the committee to complete its deliberations on its report before tabling in the next Parliament Sitting.

Motion seconded by the Member for Lefaga and Faleaseela and Member for Faasaleleaga No.2; Motion approved.

iii. Economic Sector Committee

The Chairperson of the Committee, Afioga NIUAVA Eti Malolo moved a motion pursuant to S.O 166(2), for the Assembly to approve its request for an extension of time for the Committee to fully complete its deliberations on the P.P.2023/2024 No.41;

Motion seconded by the Members for Falealili No.1 and Sagaga No.4; Motion approved.

iv. Infrastructure Sector Committee

The Chairperson of the Committee, Afioga FEPULEAI Faasavalu Faimata Sua, moved a motion in accordance with S.O166(2), for an extension of time for the Committee to fully complete its work before reporting to the Legislative Assembly.

Motion seconded by the Members for Lefaga and Faleaseela, Sagaga and Aana Alofi No.1; Motion approved.

Mr Speaker – Point of Order

Mr Speaker wanted to correct that the Minister for MPE seconded the motion by the Standing Orders Committee Chairperson rather than the Minister for MCIL.

V. GOVERNMENT ORDERS OF THE DAY – Reading of Bills

Announcement from Mr. Speaker:

Mr Speaker reminded and emphasized to Members that the Supplementary is an addition to the main budget; therefore, their views should be focused on the merits of the Bill to save time.

1. Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No.1) 2023/2024 – debate of second reading commenced.

Mr. Speaker opened the floor for Members to speak on the Supplementary Bill.

1. Afioga SULAMANAIA Fetaiai Tauilili Tuivasa - Member for Vaimauga 1

The Member greeted the House and acknowledged God's guidance upon Parliament and His blessings that has brought all Members safely to the first parliamentary sitting for 2024. He then greeted Mr Speaker, the Hon Prime Minister and Cabinet, then extended greetings to the Leader of the opposition and his fellow Parliamentarians.

The Member acknowledged the role of clergies in Samoa and greeted his Constituency in all its honorific salutations. He then spoke on the Bill and commended the Minister of Finance for preparing the Supplementary Bill noting that it is not an easy task. He expressed his approval on the bill; Then mentioned the following issues:

The Member noted that the increase in salaries of Ministers & Associate Ministers should not be included in the supplementary as this should be included in the main budget (Appropriation Bill). He also suggested the cessation of Associate Minister positions to cut back costs especially during these challenging times with the increase in cost of living.

- **Recognised Seasonal Employment Scheme (RSE):**

In reference to the RSE Scheme, the Member raised that there have been numerous issues since the work scheme was transferred from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour to the Ministry of Finance noting the expenses associated with the transfer. Additionally, the Member noticed that several committees have been tasked with managing and overlooking seasonal work schemes thus adding more expenses to Government. Thus, the Member advised the Government to thoroughly reconsider this

issue to avoid unnecessary spending as there are already existing staff who are responsible for the management and administration of the seasonal work scheme.

- Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development:

The Member suggested to the Minister for Women whether the Ministry can appropriate funds to pay for 3 staff members working at his constituency's office given that the 1million fund for his constituency has not been fully distributed. Furthermore, the Member queried whether their own constituency could audit their finances instead of paying more money to hire private auditors with expensive fees. Further stated that government auditors are preferable over private auditors as this will also prevent any potential conflict of interest.

- National Provident Fund:

The Member commended the Minister of Finance for the initiative to include and recognize people with disabilities through the introduction of the 'disability fund'.

- Ministry of Health:

The Member mentioned the shortage of pharmaceuticals at the main Hospital.

- **Afioga Hon VALASI Luapitofanua ToogamagaTafito – Minister of Health Interruption (Point of Clarification).**

The Hon Minister clarified that there have been speculations on the paucity of medicine, however this is not a new issue, and that there are currently enough supplies at the pharmacy. Furthermore, the Hon Minister explained his disappointment on the term used by the Member regarding disabled people.

Speakers Ruling

Mr. Speaker ruled to remove the statements made by the Member for Vaimauga 1.

Afioga SULAMANAIA Fetaiai Tauiliili Tuivasa - Member for Vaimauga 1 (cont.)

The Member continued to address the Minister of Health and advised to thoroughly consider the National Kidney Foundation and the rising cost of services when utilizing the Foundation's dialysis treatments, especially for those from overseas countries.

- **Afioga Hon VALASI Luapitofanua Tafito – Minister of Health Interruption (Point of Clarification)**

The Hon Minister clarified that in September 2023 the Revenue Board alongside the Cabinet reviewed and passed the price changes for the utilization of dialysis machines. Noting that currently the cost of dialysis is SAT\$600 for Samoan citizens visiting from New Zealand, Australia and USA, and \$1,000 for foreign citizens. In

comparison to New Zealand, it costs NZD\$980. Furthermore, the Hon Minister elaborated that patients conducting treatments in New Zealand are required to pay \$4,000 before the dialysis treatment commences hence highlighting this major difference in costs of dialysis between the two countries. He further mentioned that he advised our diaspora community who visit for family occasions to book an appointment at the Kidney Foundation if they intend to use it. He highlighted that all machines have been prioritized and booked for local patients thus, it would be difficult to find a free machine to use if needed urgently.

Afioga SULAMANAIA Fetaiai Tauiiili Tuivasa - Member for Vaimauga 1 (cont.)

The Member raised concerns with the CEO for the Ministry of Health as he also runs his private clinic and suggested that this should be reviewed as it may lead to potential conflicts of interest.

Mr Speaker – Point of Order:

Mr Speaker reminded the Members to mind what they are saying and advised the member for Vaimauga 1 to refrain from making ‘hearsay’ statements, as this can have consequences when asked to provide evidence before Parliament.

Afioga SULAMANAIA Fetaiai Tauiiili Tuivasa - Member for Vaimauga 1 (cont.)

- Minister of Natural Resources and Environment:

The Member reminded the Minister of his request to return his constituency’s land.

- Minister of Communication and Information Technology:

The Member mentioned the internet project ‘SchoolNet’ for schools in his constituency and stated that this project has yet been operational therefore asked the Minister for a solution.

- Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure:

Afioga SULAMANAIA reminded the Minister on the health and safety impacts of the Fagalii Airport on certain members of his constituency, thus urging the Minister for proper compensation for families affected with noise and air pollution from the airplane fumes.

2. Afioga FUAAVA Suluimalo Amataga, Member for Aleipata itupa i luga

The member greeted the Hon PM, Cabinet, Associate Ministers, and all members present in Chamber. He also greeted heads of Government ministries and corporations present in the House. The member acknowledged the whole of Samoa and his constituency in all its honorific salutations. He then pursued to highlight few issues relating to the Supplementary Bill:

- Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture:

The member advised to maintain the Government's focus on boosting education in the country through different programs like the 1million project which his Constituency managed to use to provide scholarships for students within his constituency and stressed the importance of a well-educated community. Furthermore, the Member also mentioned that, if students and children living out back are well educated in village schools then they can help develop their families.

The Member mentioned that his Constituency only has 3 schools in 3 different villages (Lalomanu, Vailoa and Ulutogia) noting that the number of students and teachers are low, thus the Member consulted with the Minister and CEO and was told that due to the low number of students in the school at Ulutogia it should be closed. Then he suggested to offer incentives for teachers in respective villages to retain their interest in teaching at their village schools rather than applying to teach in urban schools to counter the shortage of teachers in rural schools.

Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly were set aside at 10.45am
and resumed at 11:20am

Afioga FUAAVA Suluimalo Amataga, Member for Aleipata itupa i luga (cont.)

The Member continued to emphasize the importance of education for all students to ensure a bright future for our children and nation. Furthermore, education is an important aspect of life to ensure children can identify and differentiate between facts and fake news.

He then touched on the 1million project administered by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development. The member reiterated on the need to release the remaining funds for the project to certain constituencies including his constituency. He is concerned as there is only 4 months remaining for the current FY and they have yet to receive their second 1million appropriation. He further emphasized that there are plans for his constituency currently on hold until the funds are received, especially to pay for personnel costs. The Member elaborated that he hoped for the second 1 million allocation to pay for customs tax of approximately \$25,000 to clear their container at the wharf with agricultural supplies for the development project in his constituency. Furthermore, due to the lack of funds, committee members for the Fono Faavae are hesitant to attend meetings as there is no money to pay them. Given this problem, the Member suggested whether the Ministry of Finance can make arrangements to allow the Fono Faavae to continue with their meetings and payments will be made to the members once funds have been received.

CHOGM – Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings:

The member raised the importance of Samoa's preparedness to host this monumental meeting and iterated that security measures must be heightened to ensure the safety of Samoa and delegations coming into our nation. He mentioned the increase of illicit drugs in Samoa and

reminded Government of his previous statements that the wharf at Aleipata is a potential entry point for drugs into our shores and therefore warrants an inspection.

- Ministry of Customs and Revenue:

The Member queried the status of the heavy-duty scanner for the customs office to help curb the rising drug-related issues. He further requested an update on the K9 dogs as these assist the police with finding illegal drugs. The Member suggested collaborative efforts with Samoa and American Samoa to deal with drug-related issues for the protection of our shores and the safety of our people given the recent incident with the kite-runner boat.

- Ministry of Health:

The Member acknowledged the Minister's clarification on the rise in patients requiring dialysis treatments then stated that the drastic increase in the cost of dialysis from \$150 to \$600 is too much for our citizens visiting our country, given they also have families and children to feed.

- National Provident Fund:

The member queried the extra fees imposed by NPF on member's contributions, particularly, withdrawal fees, transfer fees, transaction fees, etc... then suggested to reconsider these extra costs on members.

3. Afioga FEPULEAI Faasavalu Faimata Su'a, Member for Salega 1

The member greeted the House and all those who were listening in, he also addressed his Constituency then spoke on the Supplementary Bill. The member requested the Ministry to reduce the cost of duty fees for stationary containers as these are for educational purposes. He mentioned that his constituency's Fono Faavae is keen on receiving \$80,000 from the 1million project to cater for salaries of their committee members. He then expressed gratitude to the Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure for the renovations made on both Mulifanua and Salelologa wharfs to cater for our people travelling domestically between Upolu and Savaii. He also mentioned the need for proper maintenance work near the Salelologa wharf beside the DMC restaurant.

- Samoa Land Corporation:

Afioga FEPULEAI requested the Corporation to give 100acres of Government land in the village of Siuvao within his constituency to reside on as the population continues to grow. Furthermore, he also voiced a request for the land in Asau area, that 2 acres can be reserved for his constituency to farm and cultivate; then concluded by thanking Mr Speaker for his time.

4. Afioga AIONO Tile Gafa, Member for Aana Alofi 2

The Member offered greetings to all who were present in the House and to Samoa listening in; particularly the Ao o le Malo and Council of Deputies. He extended greetings to all Government

officials present and the Clerk & Deputy Clerk of OCLA, and further greeted his Constituency and all the clergy members by acknowledging their unwavering support and prayers for Samoa.

The member commended the Minister of Finance and staff in preparing the Supplementary Bill. Then pursued to outline his constituency's requests.

He spoke on the positive realities noted in Samoa since the re-opening of borders, as well as the increase of families travelling from overseas for family occasions and numerous bestowments of matai titles as seen around Samoa, thus the importance of having Samoa's own airline.

Issues raised by the Member:

The member noted that it would be beneficial for Samoa to have its own airline given the influx of people coming into the country. He then urged the Government to thoroughly reconsider bringing back a national carrier as it will greatly assist with generating revenues for our economy as well as to counter the soaring airfare prices. He then requested the Minister of Finance to consider acquiring an airline for Samoa, noting that this would be another busy year with CHOGM in October.

- Samoa Shipping Services:

The Member acknowledged the arrival of the Nafanua vessel into the country and noted its importance to ensure the safety of our people.

- Ministry of Police:

The Member mentioned the alarming increase in drug raids around the country, noting the severity of this issue as it has involved and exposed children to such dangerous affiliations. The Member stated that he cannot comprehend how the youth have access to these illegal substances and urged that families and communities should be vigilant with their personal surroundings to ensure the environment is safe for our children.

- Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture:

Acknowledged the CEO for the plans and readjustments of the school calendar this year, allocating more school days for the first three quarters while the last quarter will be cut shorter to accommodate for the CHOGM.

- Ministry of Health:

He commended the Minister for his clarification on issues raised by members and noted his concerns with the COVID spreading again in the country; he suggested that the Ministry provides consistent information on the stats for COVID in our country so that the public can act accordingly and take precautionary measures.

- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment:

The Member reminded the Minister and CEO of the request he sent to them regarding the issue they have faced since they have shifted their church services to their hall as the church is under renovation, given the close proximity of the hall to the shoreline, it is severely impacted by sea-level rising urging the need to immediate assistance.

- Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development:

The Member acknowledged the Minister and her ministry on the implementation of the 1million district development fund, then requested that the remaining funds for his constituency be released as there are sensitive matters in his constituency that will not change to address the conditions of the 1million project, thus the Member sought the Ministry's consideration and understanding to this matter.

5. Afioga LEAANA Ronnie Posini, Member for Safata 1

The Member greeted the House and his constituency then commended the Minister of Finance and his ministry for preparing the Supplementary budget and raised some of his constituency's request:

- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment:

The member reminded the Minister of his request for seawalls in the villages of Sataoa and Saanapu to counter the impacts faced with king tides and high waves. He noted that seawalls will assist with the protection and conservation of the land.

- Ministry of Health:

The Member requested a progress report on the request for a hospital in his constituency, it is a much-needed service to cater for villages out back and his constituency given the distance to travel to Motootua hospital.

- Ministry of Works, Transport and Infrastructure:

The Member reminded the Minister of the damage caused from heavy rainfall to ensure there is enough funds to cater for road repair works.

- Ministry of Education Sports and Culture:

The Member commented on the issue of having internet in secondary schools and asserted there are only two laptops for each school which he perceives is not enough and therefore encouraged to have more laptops and resources in each school. He then suggested to withhold the SNBH project due to lack of proper resources.

- **Hon TOELUPE Poumulinuku Onesemo - Minister of Communication, Information and Technology – Interruption**

The Hon Minister clarified that the request put forth by the Member for Safata 1 is mainly for primary levels but accentuated that such system is applicable for year 8 students. He further mentioned that during COVID19 the internet project was of great assistance to schools and students in keeping connected and progressing with learning.

- **Hon OLO Fiti Afoa Vaai - Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure – Interruption**

The Minister stated that this school-internet project was discussed for more than ten years and noted that these issues commenced when the SamoaTel was sold. Further clarifying that the

reason why we are using Digicel and Vodafone is because there are other areas in the country that the connectivity of these ISP could not reach (limited connectivity).

- **Hon TOELUPE Poumulinuku Onesemo - Minister of Communication, Information and Technology – Interruption.**

The Hon Minister added that the other issue that came about at the time was the privatization of the infrastructure which should not have been done.

Afioga LEAANA Ronnie Posini, Member for Safata 1 (cont.)

- **Ministry of Customs and Revenue:**

The Member reminded the House of a matter which he often raised in previous meetings, to increase drug raids to help eradicate this issue. He further asserted that this is why Samoa needs the scanner to ensure that these substances are detected upon entry into our country. The Member noted that he has not seen K9 dogs at the airport or at the Matautu wharf to assist with detecting these substances at the airport and all entry points in the country then queried whether this unit still exists. Furthermore, he queried whether there are any assistances from the overseas police in investigating death cases which has also affected some of the Members of Parliament.

- **RSE Scheme:**

The Member raised concerns with the process, stating that the selection process for this scheme will be handed over to respective constituencies; however, to date, there has yet been a response from Government regarding this matter, insinuating that there's too much talk but no action. He then sought the Government for the right information and action.

- **Hon LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao Fosi - Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries – Interruption.**

The Hon Minister asserted that drugs have been in Samoa for a while now, and that the Government continues to address these problems. In relation to not having enough resources for the school internet project, the Minister accentuated to the Member that it is his responsibility as the representative of his constituency to assist in such matters. Furthermore, he urged the Members' patience as the Government works towards solving all these issues and to mind his words, as the Government is trying to create policies to ensure the scheme operates effectively without any issues.

- **Hon OLO Fiti Afoa Vaai - Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure – Interruption.**

The Hon Minister spoke on the issue of port security and drugs, the Minister mentioned that around May or June the x-ray would be delivered for Matautu wharf particularly for travels between Samoa and Tutuila. The Hon Minister clarified that the scanner is delayed due to adjustments made by the MCR to bring in a portable scanner that can be easily transported in any area and convenient to monitor all entry points. In reference to the K9 unit, the Minister asserted that in due time the K9 order of about 4-5 dogs will arrive in Samoa.

- **Hon VALASI Luapitofanua Toogamaga Tafito Selesele - Minister of Health**
– **Interruption.**

The Hon Minister stood to move a motion for the removal of words spoken by the Member for Safata as such statement are inappropriate.

Mr Speaker Ruled to withdraw the words spoken by the Member for Safata 1 from Parliamentary Records.

Afioga LEAANA Ronnie Posini, Member for Safata 1 (cont.)

The Member continued his address by speaking on the Kidney Foundation and the prices for dialysis treatments, specifically for Samoans diagnosed with dialysis visiting Samoa (and wish to get treatments at NKF). He noted that \$600 is considered high, given that these people also pay expensive airfares to come to Samoa as we do not have our own airline therefore these factors should all be considered before setting the prices for our services.

- **Hon VALASI Luapitofanua Toogamaga Tafito Selesele - Minister of Health**
– **Interruption.**

The Hon Minister noted that the issue about the rise in dialysis price has been clarified and that the Ministry provides other options to our people from overseas to use their Samoa passport if they want to be charged with the local price.

OTHER ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE SPEAKER:

Mr. Speaker announced that there will be a seminar held by the working group (AG, MOF, MWCSO, MNRE etc) which will clarify the progress and other important matters pertaining to the 1million District Development Project, therefore, lunch and the meeting will be held at the Maota o Tofilau Eti Alesana building.

**Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly adjourned at 1:09pm
and will reconvene on Wednesday 24, 2024 at 9:30am.**