

## **DISCLAIMER**

This Report provides a brief of the Proceedings of Parliament on **Wednesday 6 March 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 **Wednesday 6 March 2024**, you should consult the official Hansard or seek assistance from the Office of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

**Day 2  
9:36am**

### **I. Announcement from Mr. Speaker**

Mr Speaker greeted Parliament and especially welcomed the participants of the Primary School Parliamentary Program who were seated at the public gallery. Mr Speaker informed that these parliamentary programs are initiated by the Office of the Clerk to educate and engage with students and citizens to improve their understanding of Parliamentary work.

### **II. Presentation of Papers**

A total of 4 Parliamentary Papers were presented in Parliament, these consisted of 3 Annual Reports (ACC 21/22, LTA 22/23, and Senior Citizens Benefit 22/23) and 1 Government Response.

### **III. Presentation of Parliamentary Committee Reports**

A total of 14 Parliamentary Committee Reports were presented:

- 3 reports from the Economic Sector Committee,
- 6 reports from the Social Sector Committee, and
- 5 reports from the Finance and Expenditure Committee.

### **IV. Government Orders of the Day- Reading of Bills**

#### **i. Electoral Amendment Bill 2024 – debate on second reading (cont.) Day 2**

#### **i. Afioga ALE Vena Ale, Member for Faleata 4**

The Member acknowledged Mr Speaker and all who were present in Chamber. He then addressed Samoa in all her honorific glory and our neighbouring islands, Tutuila and

Manu'a. He again emphasized that he did not reject the Bill as mentioned by the Member for Vaimauga 1.

**Afioga SULAMANAIA Fetaiai Tauiliili Tuivasa, Member for Vaimauga 1 - Interjection**

The Member requested the removal of the words spoken by the Member for Faleata 2 as the public is listening and it is disrespectful.

**Speakers Ruling:**

Mr Speaker reminded the Members to respect each other as they are giving out their speeches, and keep in mind that there are students in our midst listening to them as leaders of the country; thus he instructed the Clerk to remove words spoken by the Member for Faleata 4 as requested by the Member for Vaimauga 1.

**Afioga ALE Vena Ale, Member for Faleata 4 (cont.)**

The Member acknowledged the Minister responsible for the Bill and expressed his constituency's support for the Bill and stated that he has advised his constituency once the Bill is passed they should heed the provisions and instantly participate in registrations. The Member advised his constituency and voters to abide by the law once enacted, specifically the registration process. In addition, Afioga ALE stressed that Members should take lead in encouraging their constituencies to register instead of waiting for the Office to come around. This is taking into account that every voter should be registered by October 2025 that is 6 months before the General Election.

The Member advised the Commissioner of the need for sufficient staff of the Office to conduct outreach registrations to ensure full participation of constituencies. Furthermore, he also advised the Commissioner that plans to update the rolls must be completed before the allocated timeframe as he recalls the Commissioner mentioned this initiative would take 18 months.

**Mr Speaker – Point of Order:**

Mr Speaker reminded Members to take caution with their speech and statements to maintain the decorum of the Chamber.

**Hon Prime Minister**

The Hon Prime Minister clarified that the Pre-Sitting is officially recognized in the Standing Orders.

**Mr Speaker – Point of Order:**

Mr. Speaker clarified to the Members that pre-sittings and its proceedings are official and provided for in Standing Orders, as it is considered work of Parliament.

**ii. Tofa Hon TUUU Anasii Leota, Member for Siumu**

The Associate Minister greeted Mr. Speaker and all Members of Parliament and Government Officials as well as the Clerk and Deputy Clerk. He then addressed his constituency and acknowledged all participants of the program who were present in the House for the Parliamentary Program. The Member stated that his speech would focus on recommendations and give advice on ways that would assist the Commissioner and Office when they conduct this initiative and reasserted despite the tone of his voice that does not mean he rejects the Bill.

**Afioga SULAMANAIA Fetaiai Tauiliili Tuivasa, Member for Vaimauga 1 - Interjection**

The Member wanted to remind the Member for Siumu that Pre-sitting proceedings are recognized as part of Parliamentary business. Also, advised the member that he should not talk much about the Bill given that he is the Associate Minister for the Office of the Electoral Commission to save time and fast track parliamentary proceedings.

**Mr. Speaker – Point of Order:**

Mr Speaker advised the Member for Vaimauga 1 that his name was never mentioned by the Member for Siumu, he then iterated that although Pre-sittings are officially recognized and provided for in the Standing Orders, it only gives the opportunity for respective CEO's to present on the background and purpose of the Bill, as well as to respond to concerns raised by Members. However, these briefings are not recorded thus is does not have a hansard.

Much debate went on between the Hon Member for Siumu and the Member for Falelatai and Samatau, this prompted Mr Speaker to advise the Members to refrain from discussing acts that have officially been passed by parliament and to focus their remarks on the Amendment Bill discussed.

**Tofa Hon TUUU Anasii Leota, Member for Siumu (cont.)**

The Associate Minister concluded by expressing his constituency's support for the Bill and then acknowledged the Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure for repairing and maintenance of the roads in his constituency.

**iii. Afioga MASINALUPE Makesi Masinalupe, Member for Falelatai ma Samatau**

The Member addressed the House, acknowledged the presence of students from various schools around the town area. Then highlighted the importance of the Bill especially with the registration process for all voters. He also acknowledged the clarifications provided by the responsible Minister as well as the Prime Minister on the objective and intents of the Bill. He mentioned the issue of having an outdated system and reminded the Members that the new system is needed to keep up with the times and ensure an updated electoral roll is produced. He also expressed his support for the amendments on sections 13 and 23 in regards to the registration process. The

Member clarified to the Commissioner and Minister that his remarks are not to be considered as instructions but as recommendations so as to ensure constituents have a clear understanding on these matters. The Member stressed the importance of enhancing awareness programs about the new System proposed by the Office so people are well informed and avoid complaints about it later.

**iv. Afioga ALAIASA Moefaaouo Malagatutogiai Sepulona Moananu, Member for Anoamaa 1**

The Member greeted the house in all its honorific salutations and generally expressed his support for the Bill. His only concern as mentioned in the Pre-Sitting briefing is regarding the time of implementation. The Member is concerned that there is not enough time to implement the mass-registration of voters. He then recalled an issue in the past whereby the nature of our people who leave things at the very last minute, caused much chaos at the office's headquarters where the public were surging for registration before the closure of the electoral roll. He then raised the provision that enforces all eligible voters (21 years) to register, then queried whether the new system can measure this process through the online registration. He then requested the office of the OEC, if the people coming outback to register can stay longer for those working till 5. The Member also mentioned the involvement of the Fono Faavae committee in the registration process and queried whether an incentive can be given to the Committees for their assistance. The Member also asserted the need to verify required documents has he noted that some individuals have 2 birth certificates and hopes this re-registration process will detect those who register twice.

Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly were set aside at 10.48am  
and resumed at 11:42am

**ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE CHAIR:**

Mr Speaker reminded Members to direct their remarks on the Bill and refrain from straying off topic as it will unnecessarily drag proceedings.

**v. Afioga FEPULEAI Faasavalu Faimata Sua, Member for Salega 2**

The Member acknowledged the responsible Minister and the Office for preparing the Bill, he stated that in his opinion the Bill has no errors and therefore should be enacted immediately given that the implementation process requires enough time. He then touched on the online registration process and asserted that the 2019 Principal Act already provides for online registration as clearly mentioned by the Commissioner during Pre-Sitting, however the proposed amendment provides the process of how this will be implemented.

The Member then highlighted some of the concerns raised by his constituency regarding the Bill, he noted that this is of the utmost importance so that his constituency will not complain to him as their leader when the System is implemented. The first concern raised was whether the online registration will provide an avenue for overseas candidates to enter. The Member clarified to his Constituency that the Bill is only for Registration of voters rather than nominating or appointing Candidates for election.

The Member mentioned that with any new initiative, challenges and problems are bound to arise, as we are in the trialing process. The Member urged this is the time to consider these inevitable matters that may obstruct the works of the Office. He also supports the involvement of the Fono Faavae to assist with the registration process specifically as they are well-aware of their constituents. The Member added that this provides eligible voters the opportunity to participate in our general election.

**Afioga SULAMANAIA Fetaiai Tauiliili Tuivasa, Member for Vaimauga 1**

The Member stated that overseas Samoan citizens were always able to vote in previous elections, but they had to travel to Samoa to physically register and cast their vote.

**Tofa LEALAILEPULE Rimoni Aiafi, Member for Faleata 3**

The Member added that it is clearly articulated in the Bill that it is for online registration, there is no mention of online voting.

**Afioga FEPULEAI Faasavalu Faimata Sua, Member for Salega 2 (cont.)**

The Member again expressed gratitude to the Minister for the Bill and asserted that his constituency will be responsive and assist with the Office's registration project, he then requested the Commissioner to establish an outreach base in Salelologa for convenience and concluded by expressing his support for the Bill.

**vi. Afioga MAULOLO Tavita Amosa, Member for Sagaga 2**

The Member greeted the House and pursued to highlight the pros and cons of the proposed Bill. The Member noted that the Bill opens ways for more people who live overseas to vote and have a say in the affairs of Samoa. He advised the Government to thoroughly consider the number of our people that live overseas compared to locals which is a considerable gap. He noted that there are more people from overseas thus, this questions who will hold Parliament accountable or who will direct Parliament; will it be the locals or those living overseas.

The Member mentioned the designing of the new system, whereby the Commissioner stated that their local IT's designed the new system. Susuga MAULOLO expressed concerns with this, stating that this may potentially give rise to conflict of interest and matters of confidentiality, whereby the IT's have created a software that they themselves will use. He also raised the issue of possible attacks and loopholes that are unknown to the public but only the IT's are well aware

of such loopholes and flaws of the system. He gave the analogy of prisoners building their own prison cells.

Furthermore, the Member advised Parliament to look ahead especially on economic implications to be well prepared if such issues occur; especially for families who have pension benefits overseas as there are provisions and specific timeframes that they must meet in order to be eligible for their benefits. The Member asserted that he understands that systems have errors, and amendments can be made, however if 2026 arrives and the system is not ready or it fails, then we will be faced with major implications.

**vii. Afioga Aiono Tile Gafa, Member for Aana Alofi 2**

The Member expressed gratitude to the Minister and the Commissioner for the Bill and its intentions. He then recalled the presentation by the Electoral Commissioner and stated that he was positive about the new system and confident that his Office can deliver on their proposed plans. He then noted the clear explanation provided by the Minister on the intentions of the Bill along with advice and recommendations provided by Members acknowledging this proposal. Afioga AIONO understands that for any new initiative or process, there will be numerous opinions on both the pros and cons, and he believes this is vital for preparations and awareness of those who will implement the intentions of the Bill. He then advised the Government to thoroughly consider the process that will be implemented to ensure all overseas people who have registered travel to Samoa to cast their vote. He emphasized that this Online Registration will increase the number of voters for each Constituent Roll thus, he questioned whether the Government is ready for this given the limited timeframe we have left before the General Elections. Moreover, the Member advised the Government that these challenges must be considered to avoid the Commission of Inquiry from highlighting multiple errors/issues after each General Election.

**viii. Afioga LEANA Ronnie Posini, Member for Safata 1**

The Member expressed his concerns with the old system in the event that it crashes during the General Election, how can this be addressed. He then acknowledged the ITs who worked on the designing of this new program/system but further asserted there will be unforeseen issues and to take heed of this. The Member touched on Registration, namely a 100% increase in registrations for the next General Elections. The Member also noted that after voters register online they have to travel to Samoa to take their photos and biometrics; although the Member believes this is too much work he deems this necessary as voters need to complete the requirements [registration, photo and biometrics] in order for their names to be included in the roll. This would save the system from containing vast unnecessary information.

**• Hon LEATINUU Wayne Soialo, Minister for MCIL – Clarification:**

The Minister clarified the issue raised by Members that people's names will only be on the Roll after all necessary steps have been completed, such as entering their details online and traveling to Samoa to complete their Biometrics. It is only after these steps are completed that their names will be entered in the Constituency's Roll.



**ix. Afioga LEAANA Ronnie Posini, Member for Safata 1**

The Member commended the Minister for his clarification, however he reasserted his concerns with this especially in terms of hackers easily attacking the system and accessing confidential information. Furthermore, he raised concern with the Online Registration which opens a gateway for people who know nothing about the Samoan culture and tradition (Second Generation individuals since they are eligible for Samoan citizenship) to register and vote during our General Elections. He stressed that this might cause more confusion and complexities for our Elections. For instance, the Member noted that these people who know nothing about Samoa might be easily influenced by their families or friends with their vote instead of what they believe in.

- **Hon LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao Fosi, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries:**

The Hon Minister asserted that they are preparing and have plans to propose subsequent legislations to address the matters mentioned by Members; he advised members not to disregard the contribution of our people from Overseas to our country and that it should be encouraged so that they may contribute in the development of our country. Furthermore, he asserted that there are also plans to enable overseas Samoan citizens to vote in the General Elections.

- **Hon TUILAEPA Dr Sailele Malielegaoi, Opposition Leader**

The Opposition Leader advised that the Bill should have been tabled in its entirety so that it can be deliberated on together instead of tabling one part first and then other provisions later. He also advised the Minister for Agriculture that the Minister responsible for the Bill should be responding to issues raised instead of him.

- **Hon LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao Fosi, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries:**

The Hon Minister asserted that it is the collective responsibility of Government to address such matters.

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

The Member emphasized that the amendment proposed intends to clear the electoral roll, however, it is within Government plans to rearrange boundaries and therefore, he suggested that all these plans and arrangements should have been provided in one bill to prevent any difficulties from re-entering registrations in accordance to their respective constituencies.

- **Hon LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao Fosi, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries:**

The Hon Minister reminded the House that there were no plans made by FAST in regards to Division of constituencies the only matter that was made was to return the seat of Saleaula.

**Mr. Speaker – Ruling:**

Mr Speaker ruled that deliberations on the matter be concluded, then instructed the Clerk of the House to remove words spoken by Afioga LEAANA as suggested by the Hon. Minister of Health.

Proceedings adjourned at 1pm and will reconvene at 9:30am Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024.