

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

DAILY HANSARD

SECOND MEETING – EIGHTH SESSION

TUESDAY 10TH OCTOBER 2006

The Hon Speaker, Sir Peter Kenilorea took the Chair at 9.30 am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Commerce, Industries & Employment, National Reconciliation & Peace, Fisheries & Marine Resources, National Reform & Aid Coordination, Justice & Legal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Public Service, Infrastructure & Development, Police & National Security, Finance a& Treasury, Provincial Government & Constituency Development and the Members for Fataleka, West New Georgia/Vona Vona, West Guadalcanal, Ranonga/Simbo, Hograno/Kia/Havulei, North Guadalcanal, West Kwaio, Ulawa/Ugi and South New Georgia/Rendova.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

Special Audit Report into the Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development Tertiary Scholarships Program (National Parliament Paper No.6 of 2006)

Solomon Islands National Provident Fund Annual Report 2004 (National Parliament Paper No.7 of 2006)

Solomon Islands National Provident Fund Annual Report 2005 (National Parliament Paper No.8 of 2006)

Solomon Islands Water Authority Financial Statements for the Year ended 31st December 1997

(National Parliament Paper No. 10 of 2006)

Report of the Public Accounts Committee on its consideration of ‘The 2006 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2006’

(National Parliament Paper No. 11 of 2006)

Report on ‘The Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006’

(National Parliament Paper No. 12 of 2006)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

10. Mr KEMAKEZA to the Minister for Education & Human Resources Development: Will the Minister inform Parliament of the present Government’s policy on upgrading of existing community high schools from Form 4 to Form 6?

Hon SIKUA: Mr Speaker, the major priority of the Ministry is to ensure that all children are given the opportunity of nine years of basic education from Standard 1 to Form 3, and the Ministry hopes to achieve this goal by the year 2015.

In so far as expansion beyond Form 3, that is Form 4 up to Form 6 or even Form 7, the Ministry’s policy is to deal with such requests on a case by case basis. And in this regard, as each case comes to the Ministry from the Education Authority, we look basically at the readiness of the school and the community with the Education Authority to expand beyond Form 3. We also look at the location of the school where the request is coming from and we also look at the affordability of the Education Authority and the Community to sustain such a development in terms of money and the numbers

required as well as community support given to the school.

Mr Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Education for his excellent answers.

Question No.11 deferred

22. Mr RIUMANA to the Minister for Agriculture & Livestock: Quite significant arable land in the country has been logged which should pave the way for commercial agricultural development. Does the Ministry have any plans to develop logged over arable land?

Hon OLAVAE: Mr Speaker, the Ministry does not have any plans to develop logged over arable land, however, the Ministry will continue to be facilitating whatever rural agricultural development that landowners may wish to undertake on those logged arable land.

Mr Kwanairara: What is stopping Agriculture not to have any plans to develop logged over arable land? Is it something to do with land disputes or land that is available through customary ownership? Is that restricting development or what is the problem?

Hon Olavae: The Ministry under its rural development strategy wants to see rural farmers organizing themselves before they liaise with the Ministry to facilitate whatever rural developments they may wish to undertake.

Mr Riumana: If the Ministry wants farmers to organize themselves, can the Ministry shoulder the responsibility to organize the farmers?

Hon Olavae: This question is very important and that is exactly what this Ministry is doing at the moment so that the rural populace is aware of the importance of the rural development strategies this government is embarking on.

Mr Riumana: I thank the Minister for Agriculture for his answers.

23. Mr KOLI to the Minister for Culture & Tourism: Excavation of the suspended hidden

treasure in Tulagi was permitted by Central Islands Province and the Central Government. Can the Minister responsible inform Parliament of the excavation findings?

Hon ROGOSOMANI: Mr Speaker, there is no official report submitted to the Ministry concerned about the findings.

Mr Koli: A group of people has been carrying out similar excavation activities of suspected hidden treasure in Valiato at the outskirts of Honiara on customary land. Is the Ministry aware of this excavation?

Hon Rogosomani: Mr Speaker, as far as the Department is concerned I have no knowledge of the excavation mentioned other than the one permitted by the Central Islands Province in Tulagi.

Mr Koli: I would like to thank the Ministers for his answers.

Mr Speaker: I understand the honorable Minister for National Planning is quite ready to answer question No. 20. Would the honorable member raise it again or does he want the honorable Minister to answer it?

20. Mr RIUMANA to the Minister for Finance and Treasury: RAMSI has a significant number of consultants serving in specific selected ministries. What is the total annual budget expended on the consultant fees in this year 2006?

Hon DARCY: Mr Speaker, we have no information about the total amount of budget spent by RAMSI on consultancy fees for the period being reported and even in the past period since RAMSI arrived in Solomon Islands. This is because all the expenditures that are carried out under RAMSI are not captured under the Solomon Islands national accounts. Therefore, we do not have any information at all about that.

However, should the honorable Member wish to find out, he can approach the Office of RAMSI to find the answer.

Mr Kwanairara: Yesterday the questioner raised the same question and the Minister for Finance promised to give him the answers today.

Hon Darcy: Mr Speaker, yes he may have promised that only to find out it is quite difficult for us to attain that information because the information on the level of expenditure on the number of consultants engaged under RAMSI is actually kept outside of the country. Therefore, we were not able to obtain that information.

Mr Riimana: Does the Ministry any plans to access the record?

Hon Darcy: Mr Speaker, those are some of the issues that we are trying to address through this review of RAMSI so that information about the actual level of expenditures spent on consultancy whether those expenditures are spent here in Solomon Islands or outside, is made known to the public. Those are issues that we would want to address through the review.

It is not a review to stop RAMSI, it is a review to find out such information so that the public at large is fully aware of the actual benefits that we received from such a program in terms of financial flows that are captured in the Solomon Islands economy and the financial flows that we do not capture but are kept outside.

Those are issues we would want to address through this review program.

Mr Huniehu: As part of this partnership between our Government and the Australian Government, I think it is a good idea for the government to take stop of the various advisors, not only RAMSI advisors working in the ministries but also reports on their effectiveness because under RAMSI program hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on technical people. This Parliament needs to know the effectiveness of the aid, the outcome of their work so that if there are too many advisors deployed in the Ministry of Finance or defense for example, we have to look where else within the government services do we need technical people.

Mr Speaker, I think the Ministry of Agriculture is one of the ministries that there

needs a good qualified agriculturalist and may be the Ministry of Education too.

Hon Darcy: Mr Speaker, that is a very useful comment by the MP for East Are Are. As you know, we only know the number of people that have been engaged. And one of the things the government is looking at carrying out is to undertake the review of how effective these advisors are in terms of their engagement in the country on the various areas they have been engaged to carry their task.

Those are the things, as I have said earlier on that we would want to address in this review so that we can take stock of how many experts do we have here and how do they perform in terms of the various areas of responsibility that they been engaged in.

That is a very useful comment by the MP for East Are Are.

Mr Fono: Mr Speaker, does the Minister and the department stop having quarterly consultative meetings with donors including RAMSI where such information can be obtained?

In the past quarterly meetings that donors and the Solomon Islands Government through the Department of Planning are doing is where such information can be collected.

I am a bit surprised when the Minister said that the information in relation to the question is not available. Do you not hold quarterly consultative meetings now?.

Hon Darcy: Mr Speaker, the quarterly consultative meetings with donors is still continuing. But those quarterly consultative meetings are basically to gage the direction of donor program. The meetings don't go into the details of finding out how much is spent in this country and so forth.

The Leader of Opposition knows this very well in his previous role in the Department. You can have the round figure of what they are spending in the country but you don't know exactly how much is spent on particular consultancies that are under their program.

Donors meeting are basically to gage the general direction of aid programs in the country. So far with the meetings that have been held, we

have seen those programs going on very well and in the right direction. But I think that question deviates from the original question raised here.

Mr Zama: Supplementary question to my hard working Minister of Planning. I fully appreciate the work of our officials in the department of Finance and in all other government departments under the auspices of RAMSI.

Under the framework in which the officials were engaged in the department of Finance, for example, under that framework arrangement there is a specific time frame, for instance the Accountant General is to be engaged for 18 months and the other officials on a given period.

Can the Minister inform this House what kind and type of capacity building is engaged and what is the qualitative method in which these capacity buildings are quantified?

Hon Darcy: Mr Speaker, that is a very interesting question. It is a question that perhaps we could put on the Notice Paper because it is a very good and interesting question good for the information of this House. I would like to ask the Honorable Member to put it as a question on the Order Paper.

Mr Riumana: Can the Minister assure this House if the Ministry is satisfied with the performance and output of these consultants?

Hon Darcy: Mr Speaker, that is a very direct question and I am not going to answer it directly. But I am going to answer it in the context of this general review that the Government is intending to carry out. And I think it is fair to gage the outcome from such a review instead of just asking me for my own feelings.

Those are the kind of things we would want to find out from this review, and I think we should all support this review to find out whether or not we have been able to achieve the kind of outcome that we wanted to achieve under this arrangement. Thank you Mr Speaker.

Mr Riumana: Mr Speaker, I thank the hardworking Minister of Planning and Aid Coordination for the answers.

BILLS

Bills – Second Reading

The Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006

Hon GHIRO: Mr Speaker, I beg to move that the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006, be read the second time. This is a very simple Bill that merely involves a minor amendment to sub-section (8) of Section 6 of the Gaming and Lotteries Act, Chapter 139.

Objective and Reasons of the Bill

Sub-section (8) of Section 6 of the Gaming & Lotteries Act, Chapter 139 gives licensed casino operators two years within which to complete building the premises within which to operate. Hence, this Bill seeks to increase the number of years that licensed operators are given a complete building their premises from two years to such period as recommended by the Board and approved by the Minister.

Mr Speaker, the Bill only involves a minor amendment to subsection (8) of Section 6 of the current Gaming and Lotteries Act, Chapter 139. However, Mr Speaker, the need for doing so cannot be underestimated.

To-date, two of our leading investors in this sector are operating outside proper hotel complexes as required by subsection (1) of section 6 the Gaming and Lotteries Act. These investors have proven themselves through difficult times of our recent past, as genuine and reliable investors. Besides that, Mr Speaker, together they have employed 190 Solomon Islanders.

This figure is only reflective of the current situation. Pacific Casino when in full operation before 18th April 2006 employed more than 200 employees in this area alone. These Solomon Islanders have families to support and children who are attending schools, some of whom are facing important exams of their lives, exams that will determine their future as citizens of this country.

Yes, Mr Speaker, these investors are Solomon Islanders who have the right to be

protected. Similarly, the significant contributions they have made to the economic development cannot be undervalued.

For the information of this House, in the last financial year (2005) alone, both investors have paid to the government an amount of \$1,130,065.58 in taxes alone. Put that together with what is expended in terms of salaries, these investors undoubtedly, have contributed enormously to the economy of this country and therefore need to be appropriately accorded protection.

One, of these two investors have between now and 7th July 2007 to meet the requirement of subsection (1) of section 6 of the current Gaming and Lotteries Act, Chapter 139 or face suspension, and this amendment is the only hope to avoiding that and the subsequent likely mass redundancy of around 150 Solomon Islanders.

Passing this Bill will provide for any increase to the number of years that licensed operators are given to complete building their premises from two years to such period as recommended by the Board and approved by the Minister

Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

(The Bill is open for debate)

Mr RINI: Mr Speaker, first of all I would like to thank the Minister of Home Affairs for introducing this amendment. Mr Speaker, this amendment is a very short amendment. The Minister said it is a very simple amendment that has a wider and great impact on the economy.

Mr Speaker, the main objective or reason of this Bill is to amend section 6 of the Games and Lotteries Act. Chapter 39 of the Act at present gives casino operators two years after approval to build premises they are going to operate the casino in.

This Bill is asking Parliament to amend this section to extend the two years period to more years as recommended by the Board.

Mr Speaker, I am very, very concern about the extension of time given to operators to build their premises. We have seen that one of these operators has acquired land, and for more than 10 years no building was erected by this operator

The same operator was asking for more land, and I understand an extra land was given, and I understand very clearly here that the condition for granting the land is that within 18 months he must build. Now here is the amendment to extend it from the existing two years to more years as recommended by the Board.

On whose interest is this bill brought to Parliament? Is it in the interest of the nation or is it the interest of investors that we are bringing this bill to this House?

Mr Speaker, it looks like this Bill is in the operator's interest and not the government's interest, and therefore I find it very, very hard to accept extending the time period because we have seen already, as I have said earlier, one of the operators given a land but for the last 10 years failed to build a hotel but asked for more land and he was given land and now he is coming here through the Ministry of Home Affairs asking the government to extend the two years period allowable for anyone to build premises for a casino. Is this the type of investment this country needs? I cannot see any advantage of this investment.

We have just heard the Minister said that the two casinos contributed \$1million in the last financial year to the government. Only \$1million? Is this the type of investment we need?

We need an investor that will bring in more than a million dollars into this country, one that creates more employment instead of employing two or three hundred people. Mr Speaker, I find it very, very hard to see the rationale behind this Bill.

Mr Speaker, the conditions on what time a premises should be build is vested under the Commissioner of Lands. The Commissioner of Lands has the powers on that. Why do we contravene the Lands and Titles Act and now we are taking this power to be given to the Board when the existing legislation already has that power. It is stated very, very clear in the Lands and Titles Act that the Commission has the power.

Even in the grant instrument of lease the Commissioner states what time someone should build. People are usually given 18 months. But in this bill, Mr Speaker, the Minister is asking

through this bill for us to extend the power. What kind of power will the Board have? The Commissioner of Lands has power under the various instruments granted under lease.

I am really confused because we already have the right authority empowered by an Act of Parliament - the Lands and Titles Act to give such powers, and now the intention is to remove power from the authority and give it to the board of casino.

Mr Speaker, on that same section 6(j) it says "the exemption in whole or in part from stamp duty". There is already existing legislation for this. It is only the Minister of Finance who has power to give exemptions under the various Act, which the Minister of Finance is administering and yet here we says that the Minister through his Board will decide on the exemption in whole or in part from stamp duty.

I cannot see the reason why this clause has to be in this Act. It is already in the Stamp Duty Act and also in other Acts administered by the Minister of Finance. And in this Act it is the only Minister of Finance that can exempt or do away with any revenue the government is supposed to be collecting.

Mr Speaker, I can see this Act also contravening other existing legislations administered by the Ministry of Finance who is the custodian of government revenue.

Mr Speaker, I quite agree with the Bill except the part that the two years should be extended to more years and also section 6(j) which I have pointed out.

With these few remarks, Mr Speaker, I support the Bill.

Mr KEMAKEZA: Mr Speaker, I too would like to contribute very briefly to this Bill moved by the Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Speaker, I also endorse the comments made by the Member for Marovo, but I would like to extend the debate on how the existing provision will go along with the amended provision.

Mr Speaker, there are only two licensed casinos in Solomon Islands at this time. One operates at the Pacific Casino Hotel and the second one operates in a private house along the

streets here in Honiara. This Bill is targeting these two casino operators.

How did the Christian people on the Government side view this bill when it comes their way? How did the Christian (religious) people on the government side see this bill passing their eyes and now we are going to pass it today?

I say this because it contravenes the real nature of the principal Act. If you read the existing Act, if I can quote the same clause it says "No person other than foreign or overseas guests or visitors to Solomon Islands or approved persons have a right to enter, remain or participate in commercial gaming other than those who have special approval". Any normal Christian man on the government side when he sees this is opening up a road because overseas people come and spend their money in our country. For any Tom, Dick and Harry on the streets to get a bit of money and went to throw it in the casino will make his children and family go hungry. That is the good intention of the Bill. That is a good intention.

The fact, as stated by the MP for Marovo, is that the current operator of one of the casinos has operated for more than 10 years already outside of the provision of clause 6 and therefore, how are we still going to continue giving him that special provision? It is for that reason, Mr Speaker, that successive governments still maintain the two years period to allow an operator build a hotel premise where the casino license will operate inside. That is the good intention.

During the last administration the operator also asked for land and so the government then provided the land to the operator for building of the casino within the two years period. Here, the point raised by the Member of Parliament for Marovo is quite valid in that why did the operator not build the hotel within the two years given. That is the first point I want the Minister to clarify. I am not against the intention of this Bill, but there is conflict of interest in here.

Mr Speaker, another existing provision on clause 6 subsection (2) & (3) and even successive provisions of the subsection says 'permit issued by the Board'. But this amendment says 'a period as recommended by

the Board and approved by the Minister', a short phrase is added.

What I am trying to get at here is that too many enquiries are coming forward and therefore more and more bills are finding their way on to the floor of Parliament, and therefore, as much as possible avoid giving power to the Ministers because Ministers sometimes abuse the powers. That is the reason of the good intention on the exemption before on goods and services tax and import and export exemptions.

What is the reason for the government giving extra power when in the existing Act, as it is, in the two provisions, except the sub clause where the Minister is going to make the final decision?

I am not raising any suspicion nor am against the Minister concerned because that Minister is subject to change every now and then. He will not be there for the whole of his life.

The good intention of the Bill is also for any other Ministers for that matter. That is also an area that is added to the existing one. I would like the Minister to clarify the point why he will now assume power otherwise he is going to give him an extra 10 years.

In regards to hotel development in our country, get more people to work in the hotels, as this is helping the tourism industry in the country. That is one good intention behind this Bill. And not only that, good Christian people throughout the country speak against casino, and as you know, this issue has been a controversial one as from day one where we ended up with one casino but now it is two.

The previous administration has put a bar within the boundaries of Honiara that only two casinos are allowed to operate inside Honiara. That also is an amendment, as you all know, put in by the previous administration. But now this Bill is seeking to extend the time period from two years to whatever time period decided by the Board and the Minister.

Also this Bill is seeking to extend the provision that does not allow operating a casino outside of the Honiara Town boundaries. It says in section 3(6)(1): "A commercial gaming shall only be permitted in areas of a hotel- casino complex identified in the permit issued by the Board". That is section 1(1) and now this

section is going to be amended to allow an operator operate outside of a hotel, in a private premise where it will attract any Tom, Dick and Harry to go in and gamble.

I want to question this government where some of its members are good Christians, prominent pastors and bishops, why do you allow this bill to pass your eyes when you should be defending the many complaints by our Churches? That is the question, Mr Speaker.

The existing bill is good because it gives the operator to build the hotel, put his machines and whatever inside and operate. It is as simple as that.

As the Member for Marovo stated, this privilege was given to this operator for the last ten years but he keeps on breaking the law. Before it was two years but now you are saying it is unlimited. I can assure you that this amendment will be unlimited time, as long as the board recommends it and as long as the Minister approves it may be 10 years or the next hundred years. That is why it is in conflict with the succeeding provisions added to the good intention of the bill, but then this amendment makes it to become erroneous. That is what I want the Minister to clarify to me.

With that, Mr Speaker, I reserve my vote.

Mr HUNIEHU: Mr Speaker I just want to briefly comment on this amendment bill 'The Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006'. This small amendment must be read in conjunction with the 2004 Gaming and Lotteries Act, which specifically allows only two license holders to operate casino and gaming in the country. And we all know which two operators were allowed gaming licenses.

As a background, one of the licensed holders is in full compliance with the Act, as it is practicing gaming and lottery and also hotel beds are made available, which are two requirements of the Gaming and Lotteries Act. But the other licensed holder is not in compliance with the Act because of the difficulties it experienced with its investment.

And that is, since the Gaming and Lotteries Act came into being, it was only operating in a premise without providing bedding and other facilities provided for in the

Gaming and Lotteries Act. The reason is that after the new Act came into being, it made a submission to the government that it could not comply with the new Act because it was not given a piece of land. So it applied and through arrangement it was given a piece of land and it committed himself to developing that piece of land.

This operator developed a development plan, which was made public to the people of Solomon Islands through its exhibition at the Mendana Hotel. Unfortunately because of the magnitude of that investment, the land that was allocated to him by the Commissioner of Lands was inadequate and therefore he applied again for more land adjacent to that piece of land, enough or sufficient for this development and investment activities to take place.

According to our information he has been promised this piece of land and arrangements are underway for them to get the title. It is still to come. That is the reason this bill came into being because in order for him to comply with the Gaming and Lotteries he needs a piece of land.

Mr Speaker, talking about investment, the rioting in April had affected many investment proposals in this country. According to my investigation, more than \$2billion worth of investment was help up because of the rioting. This is bad news for investors in the cattle industry, in the mining industry and in the tourism industry. I believe this investor is no different.

The reason this bill comes into being is to allow this particular investor to comply with the 2004 Gaming and Lotteries Act that was passed by this Parliament.

If we had read the report by the Bills and Legislation Committee which was just tabled may be ten to fifteen minutes ago (sorry that it was not in the pigeonholes for Members of Parliament to read before debate), we have also expressed these concerns. That in our view if we have to apply the principles of a level playing field, then we must be fair to everyone. But our disappointments and our concerns are well covered in the report.

Mr Speaker, we observed that this Bill, although has good intentions, we have expressed grave concern about the timing of it and all that.

But in applying flexibility to the investor and in trying to be fair we have made some main recommendations, and I hope my good Minister will take these recommendations up within the spirit of the Cabinet Conclusion on page 7, and I read: "But notwithstanding the provision of subsection (1) & (3), the Minister on the recommendation of the Board may by order publish in the Gazette grant holders of commercial gaming permits, such further period as may be necessary to comply with the requirements of subsection (1)". This is to disallow the Minister an open ended time frame for him to act and when he acts the public must know and Parliament must know by making the gazettal orders for everyone to read and know.

Mr Speaker, I may say that if this is to be seen as a healing process of the Bill, I am advising the Minister to move a motion to amend the provision that he had introduced in this Parliament. That would be, in my view, acceptable.

Mr Speaker with those few remarks and with the good intention of this bill, the Bills and Legislation Committee sees no difficulty in recommending this Bill and also recommending this amendment for the Minister in the best interest of transparency and accountability.

With those few remarks, Mr Speaker I support the bill.

Mr TANEKO: Mr Speaker, I'll be very brief on this bill in which the Minister concern has seen it fit and important for this nation.

Sir, this nation is claimed to be 80 to 90% a Christian country. This is a bill, which all of us in this House think will change the nation. Those of us in this House are Christians and non-Christians. We go to Church every Sunday, whichever denominations we belong, but we are believers.

Mr Speaker, I wonder about the Minister of Home Affairs. For me, I would like to see a bill that will change the nation and make wealth for the nation, if we are true Christians. I will ask the Minister concern to bring a bill to this House asking the nation of Solomon Islands to be a tithing nation. This is not my word. Be practical and be faithful as we say in our action.

We should bring a bill that will change this nation and change all of us in this House,

our fellow employees, every company we are working for that we pay tithe to the nation of Solomon Islands so that we can expand and build the kingdom of this nation. We must change this nation, Mr Speaker.

Sir, we have tested all the possible avenues. Now we are here to approve a casino in Solomon Islands. My friends, you are begging the nation of Solomon Islands. That is the truth. This Bill is going to ruin families. They get small money and go to the casino trying their luck. We do not have to look far, Mr Speaker, the nation and our neighbors are besides us. Every fortnight with the small money they get they go into the casino trying to their luck for extra dollar. Who are we in here? Is this truly a Christian country? Are we preaching the truth? We are the ones going to Church services on Sunday to hear the Gospel of the truth.

The Minister of Finance has been telling us here about the truth. I thank the Minister of Finance that he is starting to change his attitudes and character by starting to speak the truth, because only truth alone will set us free.

I am glad that some of the speakers who contributed to this bill are very straightforward. It is true that we have to change and amend the bill. But are we amending it for the betterment of the nation or for its destruction? Let us be honest, Mr Speaker, because we are here to serve the nation - Solomon Islands.

Today is 10th October, go back to how King Solomon lived. He wept when God blesses you, he adds more trouble to it. Is this Bill a blessing to the nation of Solomon Islands or to break up families? Let us be real by bringing in bills that are of the truth.

Yes, Mr Speaker I am happy and I appreciate that this is going to contribute towards tax on goods tax, there is going to be employment opportunities, but what is next with this very little time that we have to live and enjoy God's blessings.

Mr Speaker, I am happy to see such a bill that would help our nation to grow, our environment and I believe there are other better bills that the Minister is going to bring to this House so that we can balance this nation.

I would like to appeal to my good Minister that the next bill he is going to bring to

this House, which would have my support is a bill that makes this nation into a tithing nation - a basket that would change this nation, which is found in Malachi.

We cannot deny this, we in here are believers. All of us in here are believers. All the other possible avenues have been tested.

Mr Speaker, this bill is asking us to extend the time period from two years to whatever for an operator to build a casino. If there are genuine investors, and that is why we are empowering the Minister to extend the time period, I do not know there might be a better one where God will give us any genuine investor to come in here.

Sir, what I am saying is that we have to be serious in our decision making. We do not have to look far to see this. The poor Solomon Islanders, the people who give us power to be in this House are waiting for us to deliver to them so that we can go where they are, where there is money, the bottom up approach we talked so much about.

Do you know what? The small copra man comes to Honiara to sell his copra and then he wants to try his luck for extra money and so he ends up in the casino and all the money is gone. His family and children are waiting for the money they sweated for but all the money is gone at the casino in Honiara. This is a fact and the truth. I do not have to look far. My own people when they come here they sell their trochus, sell their resources and at the end of the day there is the temptation to enter the casino hoping they will earn extra money, but instead it destroys the families at home waiting for their bags of rice to be delivered and whatever. The answer is nil, because the money is all gone and at the end of the day they come and ask us Members of Parliament to buy their fees and sea fare to send them home with nothing.

I am telling the truth here. If you Members do not like what I am saying but I cannot help it. I have to voice this out for my people.

Sir, it is true that the government is going to regenerate more money from this Bill but what are we going to do. We do not have to look far to see the consequences the casino is causing to our families.

I would like to appeal once again to the Minister concern, the Minister for Home Affairs, the Minister for ecclesiastical affairs to be more serious in bringing a bill to this House to make this nation a tithing nation. By doing that we can change this nation, 100 percent change as a nation.

It is our decision to make, the answer is on each one of us sitting in here. I resume my seat. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr NUIASI: Mr Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to speak on this floor of Parliament on this small and simple amendment made to the Gaming and Lotteries Act. I would also like to thank the Minister for bringing in this Bill with this small amendment to Section 6(8), as I see it.

Mr Speaker, I think one thing we have to realize is that this is an independent nation and we belong to the global family where we are also affected by things happening around us.

Having been in Parliament for the last six months, we have been talking about a lot of developments in which some of us have been talking much about the rural areas and some of us have been saying what we are supposed to do in this short period of time.

Mr Speaker, the government system, in my understanding, always has the tendency or the will to put in place activities that will raise revenue in order to address the difficulties, the problems and the economic crisis that all of us are facing.

Mr Speaker, a lot of us have been talking as though we are Christians and we have been saying things that would only be in the line of the Christian ways.

This bill, as I see it, with its small amendment, is a small amendment that we should just say yes on it. After all it has a clause ending whereby the Minister has to comply with and he will not be working in isolation.

Mr Speaker, establishing a casino, as far as I am concern, is not forcing anyone to go in there. If we are talking about true Christian values, we are independent in our own Christian values to decide on bad and good things, to decide on what is wrong and what is right.

Mr Speaker, if you know very well that going to a casino will affect or disturb your

family, then you are not a true Christian. That is how I see it because you are not living the Christian values you are supposed to live by.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Solomon Islands is one of the nations among all nations in the world, I see no reason why we should try and develop industries or commercial activities that would make Solomon Islands similar to other countries likewise.

Mr Speaker, I would not contribute very much, as I am one of those who sit down to consider the Bill, and when you see it on the floor of Parliament, it means I already support it.

With these few remarks, Mr Speaker, I support the motion.

Mr PACHA: Mr Speaker, thank you for giving me time to contribute to the Gaming and Lotteries Amendment bill 2006.

Mr Speaker, I shall be very brief with my contribution this morning. The objects and reasons for this amendment are clear that this Bill seeks to increase the number of years given to an operator. It is only a small amendment, as other colleagues have stated.

Now it can be seen as a small and simple amendment but sometimes it could have what I would like to call ripple effect, which is like throwing a stone inside a swimming pool with its effect growing bigger.

Casino is one of the breeding places of all sorts of problems in Honiara and in Solomon Islands. I was expecting the Minister of Home and Ecclesiastical Affairs to come up with the bill on tithing of Church. That is the bill, in my view, that should come first on to the floor of Parliament. And that would be going in the right direction. But here we are talking about casino.

Mr Speaker, I do not want talk a lot but I see this Bill as giving additional problems for our people who have interest in going to places like this.

Mr Speaker, with this small contribution, I would very much like to see the Minister responsible for Home and Ecclesiastical Affairs to strengthen areas of ecclesiastical affairs rather considering activities that already are causing problems in our country.

With these few remarks, Mr Speaker, I resume my seat.

Mr KENGAVA: Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me to also briefly contribute to the Gaming and Lotteries Amendment Bill 2006.

A lot has been said, Mr Speaker, but I want to point out one or two points so that when this Bill is passed, the Minister and the Board would take note of the importance of the observation I would like to make.

First of all, it is true the Bill is very small, as mentioned by the Minister, but sometimes so small is a bill or amendment put to Parliament that it deceives the floor of Parliament of the real intention of the bill. This is my concern.

All of us know, Mr Speaker, that a mosquito is a very small insect but it can kill a person. And so is this Bill. If we are not careful, this Bill is going to kill us. Though small is this amendment, but if we do not control it or handle it properly the way it should be, we will continue to bring in social problems and ordinary Solomon Islanders will not benefit from the revenue raised from this kind of business.

Mr Speaker, this bill, in my opinion, a layman's opinion, is a bill of convenience. It is bill of convenience, not so much for Solomon Islanders but just for a few investors in this country. May be for certain investors who need more time, need more space to move around as raised by my Honorable Member for Marovo very clearly. With only two casinos operating in the country, we know exactly who this Bill will benefit.

Sir, if it is for convenience, and you are accommodating somebody's interest then it is not fair, in my view, that such a bill should be brought in very quickly to this Parliament.

Mr Speaker, if the bill is brought into this House to encourage investment, then the bill must also accommodate certain areas that will protect the society, protect families, protect the unemployed and protect the workers.

It is very true, as raised by one of the speakers, that we have the freedom to choose whether to go to the casino or not. But that freedom must be assisted by us leaders of this nation to guide them so they make the right decision. We should not throw things out in the open hoping people will make the right choice.

Human as we are, we have weaknesses and we are prone to fall to attraction than to something not attractive.

As we already know, our great, great, great grand father Adam is a very strong man, perfect but yet Satan himself made the apple very attractive and he fell. That is the weakness of human beings and so it is not right to say we are free to choose.

If that is our thinking then we are not fulfilling our duty of protecting the citizens of this country. We are bringing a bill into this House that will cover every sector of the community.

I know there are clauses in this bill that casinos would only operate within a hotel. No persons from Solomon Islands without being a member or has special permission could enter the casinos. Mr Speaker, some of our casinos do not operate in that manner. They operate like an open market, so to speak, just like shops, just like nightclubs, just like hotels. So where is the assistance we should give our people to protect them so that they will make proper judgment whether to go to the casino or not whether they will be a member or not or whether foreigners or locals.

Mr Speaker, I think the last House also passed legislation on the same bill to allow the operation of only two casinos in this country. In restricting the freedom of investment or entrepreneur in this country, who are we serving in this particular amendment?

I am very pleased that the investor who would like to develop the Arts Gallery area is probably still given the go ahead. But I know one of the conditions is to operate a casino. I don't whether the Minister will be bringing in the next Parliament an amendment to allow for three casinos in this country. If not, Mr Speaker, as I have said this bill is a bill of convenience.

Mr Speaker, before I sit down, I think it is very important that when we bring in such a bill like this into the House which can affect the social network or social life of our people, it must be a balanced bill that also encourages investors to invest in the nation, and at the same time protect our family, our society. In this way such a bill will be fair for all.

However, the Bill itself seeks only to extend time for investors so that there is more

time. May be two years is not enough. But past records, as raised by certain MPs, shows that something must be done so that we can be more effective in implementing bills or laws in this country.

I think if an investor fails to build a hotel in the last 10 years, the failure is not on the investor, but it is upon the administration because it fails to enforce the bill and act.

Therefore, with this bill coming, a small amendment as it is, small as a mosquito, it can kill us. I would like to urge the administration that when this Bill is passed, it must make sure that it effectively enforces the regulations. If the board agrees to extend it to three years then let it be so, not another three years.

Sir, I find it a bit tiring passing bills in this House, because we pass bills, they become laws with the necessary regulations, but we fail to effectively enforce them in certain quarters. This particular bill, Mr Speaker, if it is not taken advantage of, not misuse, then the administration must make sure it enforces the regulations effectively so that what we are asking for this Parliament to approve is correctly entertained and remains effective.

Mr Speaker, whilst I have no reservation on the good purpose of this particular amendment, I think the recommendation of the Bills and Legislation Committee must be taken seriously by the Minister. Because if we do not so, then what is the purpose of having the Bills and Legislation Committee advising the floor of Parliament on a very important bill such as this one.

With these few comments, Mr Speaker, I resume my seat.

Hon BOSETO: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to thank my colleague, the Minister of Home Affairs for introducing this Bill.

Sir, I do not intend to speak on this Bill, but because statements were made on why a pastor or a bishop is on the government side or this is a Christian country and yet you are passing this bill.

Sir, I would like to share what I have been trying to do when SIAC Government came into power in 1997. In April 1998 I read a statement aimed at stopping the two casinos - Supreme Casino and the Honiara Casino.

I made a statement not to reissue the license, but ban the whole thing because I was the Minister for Home Affairs at that time. Shortly after that the SIAC Government was overthrown under the barrel of the gun and somehow it was allowed. I know at this stage that only two casinos were allowed in the country. Therefore, since there were allowed they want to come in a little bit more.

The question of investment and employment were the major things the Minister emphasized, especially employment. Employment means to sustain the livelihood of the people, family, children, and school fees in town. An investor would like to see that he has income or some return as well from an investment.

We are now trying to open the door more and more, and this comes back to the Country and Planning Board where it is said to be a civic zone, a zoning of some 30 years old now, pending to fit in certain applications for residential, commercial activities and so forth.

But my thinking now has changed. When Jesus came into the world, He wants to be in the world to be tested. He did not run away from temptation but He faced it, and He also answered questions. Therefore, development brings into the country good and bad things. Perhaps the good side of development is that it brings in money to help the nation, it provides employment for our people, and as a Christian country we are happy to see that.

Even now you can see that movies that are shown in the theatres are good and bad as well. Which movies do people choose to watch? That is a challenge to every people. Video is free and it is entering the family home. But what types of video do families borrow or loan to show in their homes? The internet is also here as well. That means most of the things we want are now entering our homes.

We do not want phonographic pictures but now our people create phonographic pictures. Those are temptations and the kind of things that come into our country because we are still living in Egypt. Egypt, as you might know, represents the world because the one who chose the people of Israel is not a world leader but God Himself. He told them to leave Egypt, paint your door with blood, be ready, cook your

unleavened bread and go out as soon as possible. Those are challenges.

Some comments were made as to why do we bring in the casinos. My way of looking at it is that we are in the world, we want money, we want employment, and therefore, it is up to us to control it through regulation, through administration and follow the instructions in relation to this Bill, which we are going to pass.

Therefore, although I am a pastor on this side and also an old man, I am 73 years old, but my way of looking at it is that the things we do not want sometimes are very tempting and as a Christian we could not stand against them. But the answer is that we must not go to the place that we think is not good for us, places that will weaken our faith. The answer is to listen to the voice that says to us, from a Christian point of view, 'go'. But I hope this Bill will also bring investment to investors and also employment to our people.

That is my view on this Bill, and since I belong to a democratic government I have to be with those who support the motion, and so I support the motion.

Hon WAIPORA: Mr Speaker, I will be very brief so that others who are interested on this bill will have a chance to talk.

Mr Speaker, a sentence in the bill says, "Hence the bill seeks to increase the number of years that licensed operators are given to complete building their premises from two years to such period as recommended by the Board and approved by the Minister". I would like to talk on this sentence.

Mr Speaker, those who have contributed to this Bill have expressed concerns about casino. I want to say that some of us here are sad that we come in when the casino is already here. Those who brought in the casino bill into this Parliament and eventually became an act know the reasons why the casino is allowed in our country and so every one of us is concerned about it. But this amendment is just calling for an extension period so that whoever operates a casino has time to build a hotel or build the premises for the casino. Because, as we know, two years is not enough time to build a big building like a hotel. Some hotels probably take about five years to complete. So it is just a

concern of extension of time to enable investors build buildings suitable for their purposes.

Mr Speaker, the casino, as stated by the Minister for Lands, also provides employment to our people. I do not the exact number of people employed, but the Minister himself will be in a position to tell us the number of employees employed at the two casinos this time.

This Bill is only a very small amendment seeking the Parliament's approval for extension of time. And I am happy that approval for this extension period will involve the Board and the Minister, as final.

In saying that, if we leaders lead the country with value and ethics of leadership that calls for honesty, integrity, accountability, transparency and impartiality, if we hold that, there would not be any problem. I know we have human weaknesses, but if we want to lead this country properly, we, leaders must be honest and have the values that I have mentioned.

Mr Speaker, this Bill is just a call for extension of time and so I am satisfied that the Board and the Minister will be involved to decide as to whether it is justifiable for an investor to extend the period of time than the two years allowed under the present act.

With these few remarks, I support the Bill.

Mr USA: Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me the floor of Parliament to briefly contribute to the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006.

First of all, I must thank the Minister and his staff for seeing in fit in bringing this amendment.

Sir, most of the time we talk so much about development in our country, most of the time we talk so much about unemployment in our country, and yet whenever any bill to open up investment comes before Parliament we always criticize them.

Mr Speaker, I stand here as a former Minister of Lands to clear a few doubts that colleagues may have on this floor of Parliament, so that we are furnished with the right information. I would like to clarify the background to the land this investor acquired, which most MPs talked so much about that has never been developed for the last 10 years.

Mr Speaker, I believe nobody will deny the impact of such a development as the casino. My simple reading of this Bill, as mentioned by other colleagues, is that it is not seeking for another 10 casinos. The casino is already there and its social impacts that we talked so much about are already there.

We are concerned about the increase in unemployment, but in order for this development to have a conducive environment to enable it expand its development is the purpose of this Bill.

Referring to one of the casino operators here, and may be some colleagues are in doubt about this land this operator has acquired, which has never been developed for the last six or seven years, I would like to give a brief background of this land.

Mr Speaker, when the particular developer acquired this land, there was a caveat lodged on the said land followed later by a High Court application. This has been going on for about five to six years. After this matter was cleared by the High Court, the developer needs extra land so that it can fit in with its development proposal. The developer applied for extra land, although we heard the particular land was allocated to the developer, administratively the Department of Lands is yet to transfer the land to the developer. Until the Department of Lands transfers the land to the developer, he will have legal title over the land which he will be then in a position to develop the site.

Mr Speaker, my personal opinion on the timing as required by this Act, I do not think it will interfere with any provision or any condition that will be inserted in the caveat under the Lands and Titles Act because it is a separate act.

The freedom of choice, the freedom of movement, and the freedom of religion are all there. I accept what other colleagues are saying that we are leaders and so we must create things that are conducive to our people.

How many problems do we have in Solomon Islands that we overcome and identify as affecting the social well being of our youths and our people? Even there is infighting in the churches today. Who is taking up these issues? Everything in all walks of life has impacts.

Sometimes we must learn to absorb and accept things in order for us to move on. Especially with our country that is currently facing unemployment problems, we need to make some radical moves. Not radical in a sense that we break the law, but it must follow the law so that we try and alleviate the unemployment problem. Or haven't we realized what is going on in our homes, in the suburbs in Honiara or even the urban centres? We, leaders in here must be creative.

This small amendment is just to make our environment conducive waiting for this developer to expand. And if it expands, although some of us say it is only benefiting the developer, what about the three or four hundred workers employed by the developer. Who are these workers? They earn their living for bread and butter. Are these workers foreigners?

Whilst we may be looking very far please try and look closer at home so that we can see the things I am talking about. On fact is that our own people will benefit from employment. And not only that, but if it develops into a casino, our farmers (most of us here give out projects on poultry, piggery, farming) they can come and sell their products to places like the casino.

Whilst we may be only looking at one side of the coin, try and look at the other side of the coin too and balance it up. Is it going to benefit only one side, Mr Speaker? Some of us can see that it is going to benefit every one of us because after all it is our country. We need to accommodate this kind of investment.

Sir, I think rather than us seeing this amendment differently, it is just for extension of time period so that the environment is conducive for this developer so that he is able to establish and employ more youths in Solomon Islands.

With this short contribution, I support the motion.

Mr MAGGA: Mr Speaker, I would like to contribute briefly to this small Bill. First of all, I would like to say that I term Solomon Islands, the prodigal son. The prodigal son we read in the Bible requesting his father to give him a share of his property, but at the end of his life he misused his will. The Solomon Islands is like that.

Many people are complaining that we do not need a casino in this country and we are not ready to have a casino in this country. But I want to make a classic example about Singapore. Singapore attained its independence in 1964 and just this year it accepted to introduce a casino.

Solomon Islands has just gained independence in 1978. We are used to the way of life that anything that is not good for our people we say is good for our people. I am making this statement because it is important for us to realize what sort of things we bring into this country.

Mr Speaker, I look at this bill as a bill that should come in two folds. The Minister of Lands should also bring in a bill to change the 18 months of constructing a building on a land. Here we are asking for the Minister of Home Affairs to extend the period of allowing a casino developer to develop a casino on a land. In my view this is not right, because under the Land and Titles Act it states very clearly that when you acquire a land you are allowed only 18 months to build a house on it. Now we are asking for a period of more than 18 months.

The casino act states very clearly that an operator is only allowed two years to construct a building to run your casino on a land and here we are asking for more.

I want to challenge the government, this is not because I'm not on the government side, I am on the government side, but when I see things are not right, I have to speak out.

As I can see there must also be a bill to change the 18 months before it qualifies a casino developer to build a building on the land. I see the reason govern by this amendment but I speak as a leader of this nation that I want and I will go along with the changes made by the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee. I would go along with their amendment because it is not right for us to ask more time for casino to be developed on our land yet the Act stated very very clear you are allowed only 18 months to build a building on your land.

Customary practice also tells us that if you are allocated a land and you set up a foundation, then you comply with the 18 months. In my view two years is a long period of time.

Sir, I support this motion but I support it on the basis of the amendment brought in by the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee.

As I said this country is like the prodigal son where we are asking too many things that do not warrant us to run in this nation. Sometimes things that do not benefit our people, we as leaders pass in this Parliament, as if we need them. I think this is not right.

Although the Bill is very simple it has many implications. If we are to increase the time period then I believe the Minister for Lands should also bring in an amendment to amend the 18 months allowed to build a house on a land.

Mr Speaker, I will not take more time, but I just want to make those observations so that we carefully look into those things. If the extension of two years comply with certain legislation and acts passed in this Parliament then it is all right. If not, then certain things have to be amended or certain acts be brought into Parliament so that they go in line with the request by the honorable Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Speaker, I resume my seat.

Hon TOSIKA: Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing the floor of Parliament to speak on this bill, the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006. I would be very brief.

Mr Speaker, my observation of this bill is that if this is a bill to pass gaming and lotteries in the first place I will oppose it. This Bill is seeking amendment to section 8 to extend time from two years to more years.

If you look at section 6(3), this amendment is very genuine on the fact that to acquire land in Solomon Islands is an ambiguous thing to do. Even, we, Solomon Islanders when asking for land in the Lands Division are finding it quite hard to acquire land within a short period of time.

I think the 18 months period should apply after someone has the title to the land that if you do not develop the land within 18 months, the Commission of Land can forfeit the land through an order by the High Court.

Sir, I said this Bill is very genuine to investors to comply with the provisions of the Gaming and Lotteries Act on the basis that

section 3 says, “No person other than foreign or overseas guests or visitors of Solomon Islands or approved persons have a right to enter, remain or participate in commercial gaming”.

The fact here is to allow more time so that investors show their genuineness in establishing a building. The Act says that unless a building is built whether it is a motel or hotel before a casino is located inside. This means only people who are guests of the hotel or foreigners are allowed to play in the casino, and not Solomon Islanders. At the moment people who do not own a hotel are given the casino license and so they are operating the casino in a normal building and that is why Solomon Islanders enter and play.

This amendment is to see the genuineness of the investors who come into the country to invest. We give them more time because they have to go through a lot of constraints made by the Solomon Islands Government. When investors come we must give them the full package of development. That is what we want. But most of the time we find investors also finding it difficult to acquire land because of the government system they have to go through that is causing a lot of constraints to them.

If an investor comes into the country and his investment proposal is approved and land is allocated straightaway, all the nonsense here would not apply. People of Solomon Islands will not go and play in the casino down there in town not located in a hotel.

My observation is that this intention here as opposed to the present one is a very genuine one. It is to extend the time period so that we can see the genuineness of investors whether they really want to invest in our country or not.

If we give adequate time to build their buildings or premises but they fail to build within the allocated time, then their license should be cancelled because it shows that they are not genuine, it shows that they are just here to make quick money.

The casino, I can tell you, is producing one of the highest commodities in the world - money. The casino is marketing money that all of us want. There is what is being marketed in the casino. Money is the commodity they are

marketing in the casino. And it is very enticing. In the world today, people fall by money, people are lured by money and people are corrupted by money.

My thinking is that two years is not enough time for an investor to come and set up his/her buildings. This Bill allows the respective Minister to act upon the recommendation from the Board is a sensible thing to do so that we can see the genuineness of investors whether they will do it or not with the time allocated to them. By doing this, it would restrict people going to the casino, not Solomon Islanders but foreigners and guests from overseas who come into the country and would like to invest in Solomon Islands or wish to come and gamble in the casino or because they choose Solomon Islands as their holiday destination.

The interest of tourists is what we would like to take on because most tourists would want to play in the casino. They want to spend their money in the casino, and most of them coming in are millionaires.

We must try to encourage people with money to come in and play in the casino. And the spin-offs are what you have stated as employment, our people will bring their market produces, their poultry and piggery for sale at the casino.

With these few remarks, Mr Speaker, I support the Bill.

Mr TOZAKA: Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak very briefly on this amendment Bill.

Sir, as other speakers have already said, especially my colleague, the Minister for Lands, the gaming and lottery industries is, in fact, present on our shores. It is here already with us.

What I mean by ‘here’ is that we have already accepted it. It landed here already and we have already formulated it with a principal act, the act we called Gaming and Lotteries.

This amendment Bill by the responsible Minister, which I would also like to thank him for bringing on to the floor of Parliament, is basically to improve the ‘check and balances’ arm of the government in as far as managing and controlling of this industry is concerned.

Sir, the Minister responsible was quite right in introducing this particular amendment

bill to the Principal Act in order to manage this industry. Gaming is already here and we have other forms of money earning gaming such as dice and kura.

What is being expressed here is the responsibility that has been placed upon us leaders as being responsible to the implementation or the enforcement of acts in our respective ministries.

The question here is, do we really need an amendment to this Act to manage this industry properly by moving this amendment.

The first question I always ask myself is, having looked at all government legislation and having made thorough consultation in respective ministries that contribute to this industry, is there need of another legislation to help manage this gaming and lotteries or is it there one already in the act - sufficiently covered in the principal act and all that is needed is to manage this industry responsibly, in this case the casino or other gaming activities.

Sir, I say this because there is one characteristic that is emerging and is becoming very clear, and that is in our leadership we tend to isolate the real issues. We seem to alienate ourselves in making decisions on the real issues because the decisions might be very difficult to make. And therefore, we make excuses in coming up with amendments.

We are using objects to do things for ourselves. We use such instruments like this amendment and also using other tools to do it for us. Instead of saying like, 'I have brought you power and authority under this act, if decision has to be made accordingly on this particular activity of the government in order to control it, I have to use it'. There is no need for us to come up with unnecessary amendments.

Having listened to other honorable colleagues who have spoken, I think truly we have a lot of legislations already, sufficient legislations that cover this particular activity to be able to control it.

Sir, what I would like to see on this gaming and lottery is something that will benefit us. Initially we accepted gaming and lotteries so that it can benefit our country. The trickle down of it addresses the problem of an employment faced by our youths.

Some countries are using the Gaming and Lotteries Act to address needs like sporting facilities, very expensive facilities in their countries which are willingly funded by donors. This is where it comes from. They use this gaming and lotteries to support the infrastructure in the country.

Sir, listening to the honorable Minister when presenting the Bill, he mentioned only \$1 million collected a year out of the casino. That brings another question as to whether we are collecting enough revenue out of this organization. Those are things I think we should be looking at, things that will help the country from this industry.

Sir, I am just speaking in principle about this amendment, but others have spoken already in support of it and I just want to make those comments and I resume my seat.

Mr TORA: Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the Honorable Minister for Home Affairs for seeing it fit and proper in taking this Bill into this House for us to consider whether it is good or not in making this small amendment.

Mr Speaker, this honorable chamber has 50 Members of Parliament entrusted by our people in the formation of this legislature to make laws of this country.

Here we are this morning, Mr Speaker, the Honorable Minister as seeing it fit and proper in bringing this Gaming and Lotteries Amendment Bill 2006 for our consideration and amending if seen proper.

Sir, we have seen and heard the good things about this amendment bill and we have also heard the bad side of it coming into force.

Mr Speaker, I see this amendment as a test of our faith as Christians. We talk too much about our country as a Christian country. It is true that all of us are Christians, no one denies that. But again in support of the head of a family, we as leaders must know that a leader begins within ourselves, inside our families and then it reaches out to where we are sitting down right now.

Mr Speaker, I think as a leader we must consider what is good, and what is bad so that living within our families, in the communities, and inside our country can be better.

The small point I would like to raise is in regards to employment where we are seeing today a lot of people employed by the casino are without jobs at this time. I think that is one of the reasons why the Honorable Minister has seen it fit for bringing this amendment into Parliament this morning.

Sir, I believe all of us have concern for our people, the people employed by companies. I believe this morning, both sides of the House are concern about our people.

When this kind of business or development is taking place in our country, it is true, as leaders, we see the bad side and also the good side of such a development. The good side of this development or this sort of business is that it creates employment opportunity for our young people and it contributes towards the national economy of our country, and the list goes on.

Some bad effects of the casino is what we already heard from previous speakers in their contribution this morning that it is a breeding place for problems. I don't believe that, Mr Speaker. I for one have not seen anyone from my constituency enter the casino. Why, Mr Speaker? It is simply because on day one of my people's arrival here in Honiara, I am duty bound as their Member of Parliament by calling them together and advising them. The first thing I told them is to respect their neighbor. Living in a place like Honiara where there are different types of people, so we must learn to respect our brothers and sisters. This is very important.

Sir, I also told them about the bad things that may affect their life when they are in Honiara. And I believe it is our duty as leaders, so called leaders, to inform our people of these things. If we know of anyone in our constituency coming to Honiara, I think the first and foremost thing is to educate them so that they are aware of what is likely to affect them when they are in Honiara.

But again, Mr Speaker, I can see employment as a very important thing and good side of this Bill. I wonder Mr Speaker, whether the employer, or the one owning the casino or the company still has concern for those who are now unemployed at this time.

Mr Speaker, sitting in this honorable chamber is 50 Members of Parliament who

make laws for this country, and if the responsible Ministry sees that there is need to bring this Bill to Parliament, then this is the proper channel to follow.

The Minister sees this amendment will allow the developer to continue constructing buildings or whatever and therefore has seen it fit in bringing this Bill so that we allow time for the developer.

Sir, I have no problem to see that in future any bill of this nature, although in our debate we might see good things and bad things of something, but that is how everything is meant to be.

We make laws for this country and as time goes on, whoever is on the government side sees fit to bring in this sort of amendment he would do so, so that everything runs smoothly for the affairs of the country.

Mr Speaker, I think I would be the last speaker to contribute to this very important amendment bill because Parliament will wind up tomorrow. Mr Speaker, I see no problem with this Bill, but again it is a test of our faith and a test of responsibility as leaders. Because I do not believe anyone of us has ever gone into the casino. Like myself, I worked in Honiara for almost 35 years now but I never entered that place you are talking about now.

(hear, hear)

And I do not even know its location except I used to go to the Pacific Casino, not to play casino. Because I know that if I start to go into the casino and play, like other speakers have said, it will cause a lot of family problem because the money that you spend in the casino is going to affect the family because that money is supposed to be spent on food and other necessities.

The previous speaker has said that this is a Christian country and so it is a test of faith to all of us. We have to decide and make our own decisions. If you say 'son you go and play casino this morning, and tomorrow I will go'. Is that a good advice? No, I do not think so.

With these few remarks, I support the Bill.

Mr KWANAIRARA: Mr Speaker, I will be very brief in contributing to this Bill. First of all, I would like to thank the Minister of Home Affairs for bringing this amendment Bill to Parliament.

Sir, this piece of legislation came into this House way back in 1998 when I was Minister for Commerce and Trade at that time, and Gaming and Lotteries came under that Ministry. There were a lot of disputes at that time regardless of the importance of gambling. Some were against it and some supported it so much so that they wanted to abolish gambling in Solomon Islands.

However, it so happened that some of the legislation were not in order and so the whole thing dragged on.

Mr Speaker, the Gaming and Lotteries Act has been amended a few times to cater for gaming and lotteries in the country.

When I was the Minister then in 1998, we went on a trip to Australia to have a look at some of the applications of gaming and lotteries in Australia. Some of our recommendations on that trip are in the report.

This issue is not a new issue, it has been in the country for some time now. We all know about it. We all know the disadvantages and the advantages of casino and gambling in the country. A lot of speakers have already stated the bad sides of it, and some supported it for the good side of it.

The only area I would like to touch on before I take my seat is the extension period in this Bill. This Bill is seeking the House's approval to extend the time given to an investor to more than two years that is now allowable under the present Act.

In my view, two years is enough time for an investor to invest in this country. This particular investor has been given almost 10 years, but he has been buying time studying the economic situation of the country. I think that is all he has been doing for the last 10 years since 1998 until this year, which is about nine to ten years now.

Sir, my fear is that opening up the time period is subjecting the Act to further abuse. This is giving more flexibility to our investors, which is not bad, but in a way this is having less control over investors coming into the country.

Mr Speaker, that is an area we need to look into very thoughtfully. If we cannot control our investors but our investors control us and control our Acts, then we would be in a very awkward situation. I would like to point here that when we allow ourselves to abuse our own Acts, it is a very bad thing for the country.

I think a couple of years ago, we tried shifting that responsibility to the Board or to an organized body rather than the Minister taking that responsibility on him. But here in this Bill we are now going back to the same old story we have shifted from. This is something we need to look into.

Sir, I am concerned about this shift because if the Minister (I am not saying the present Minister but any Minister for that matter) thinks otherwise and keeps on extending the time period, how long are we going to keep extending time for investors. Some investors are buying time, some are slow or delay in establishing their investment proposals for reasons known only to themselves. This is abuse of the Act and is not healthy for the country. That is my purpose of contributing to this amendment bill. If a genuine investor comes into the country then it is good.

Sir, there is need for us to look into many of our acts. Even the Citizenship Act, which I think will come at a later date, but some people who were given citizenship are just shopkeepers married to Solomon Islanders. Do you call that investor? This is crazy.

In other countries, when an investor comes into the country, he has to have with him/her substantial amount of money for investing in the country. It is not coming in as a shopkeeper, getting married to a Solomon Islander and then owning a big shop in China town or Auki or elsewhere. That is purely not investment. That is my concern.

Mr Speaker, we want genuine investors, people who are serious about investing in our country. We do not want people who come in but wait on the sideways for the climate to be fine before they step in. That is not a genuine investor. We want genuine investors. We want people who have money and people who come in with money and not those who come in to make money in Solomon Islands. That is not an investor. That is investing on the money of

Solomon Islands. That is not right. We want genuine investors. People who come in with money, come in with a genuine heart, come in with genuine plans to come and develop Solomon Islands. That is what we really want. We have to tighten up all these areas so that we only have genuine investors.

If you go around Honiara, Auki, Gizo, and elsewhere around the country, do you find genuine investors in those places? Not at all, and that is why our country has never been developed. It is because of weakness in our Acts. We are not strong enough to say 'no' to an investor. When an investor comes in and is given two years to develop, he must develop within that time frame. If he does not develop within the time given him, he has to leave the country.

Mr Speaker, I think it is better for us to look into our Act once again and leave it as stipulated in the Act. If a person is really genuine and wants to invest then that is fine, on merit he can be given extended time. But I do not agree that it should be regulated as open ending time so that anyone coming in has advantage of this regulation we are enacting.

That is my concern as an independent Member in Parliament. Let us not open up our Acts very much because investors can control our acts and even abuse our Acts.

Sir, I want investors who have been given approval under the Foreign Investment Act, whether under the old or new Act, to come with a genuine heart to develop Solomon Islands, and not to come and sit on the side ways waiting for the right climate before jumping in.

I want the Minister concern to take note of all the concerns I am raising. I am sure he can be a very good Minister in the months to come if he takes note.

Mr Speaker, with those brief remarks, I resume my seat.

Mr SITAI: Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me to contribute to the debate of this Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006 moved this morning by the Minister of Home Affairs.

In so doing, Mr Speaker, I am reminded of what the former Member for Central Makira said on the floor of this Parliament when

debating a similar subject that is before Parliament.

This former Member of Central Makira happens to be the predecessor of the present Minister of Home Affairs, and our good Minister for Provincial Government and Minister of Home Affairs who has introduced this amendment to Parliament. This is what he said, 'When you arrive at night and you reach Lungga or you come up from the western side and reach Visale or you come from Ngella and you head straight to the wharf, the first thing you will see are the psychedelic disco lights that are calling you from the front of these two casinos'. That is what he said. Whether this is relevant or not, the point is that a test is on us whether or not you will bow down to these colors that attract you to go into the casino, spend your money, try your luck or not.

The test on us leaders, however, is as to whether or not we shall allow for this investment to take place in this country. We have done that. So I do not think we should talk too long on this amendment. It is a straight forward one to facilitate what is required.

In my on view, what I would like to share, however, Mr Speaker, is that in the event this investor goes beyond the acceptable time limit, then I think the Board and the Minister should have the power to say, no. Otherwise we will just open this up and we do not know what time this investment will take place. This is just to safeguard us. That provision, whether or not it is in the Act, but if it is the power of the Minister to do that, then I would be grateful to protect them. The government should not allow investors to play around with us, it should have this provision that can be invoked when it is necessary.

Sir, on the issue of employment, much has already been said about that. It is true that our people are employed in these operations, and if they expand may be more people would be employed so that at least additional incomes can be a support for the families. But as we have all agreed, one of our speakers in Parliament said this morning that a coin has two sides and so you can look at this side and look at the other side, and I only hope that we are making the right decisions.

With these comments, I support the Bill.

Mr HAOMAE: Mr Speaker, I will be very brief. I would like to thank the honorable Member for Central Makira, my friend the Minister for Home Affairs for bringing this amendment to Parliament. Bringing an amendment to Parliament is not a new thing and so I have no problem with the general principles of amendments to Parliament. As other speakers have mentioned, the animal we are talking about is already in the country and so I do not have problem with that particular aspect as well.

My only concern is, Mr Speaker, whether this amendment has met the test of necessity whether it is absolutely necessary to bring this amendment to Parliament. Whether this amendment meets the test of necessity or whether the Minister has other options that are there so that he utilizes those options rather than bringing this amendment to Parliament.

Mr Speaker, when will the investor apply for a license for the casino? When? Is he going to apply when the hotel is not yet built or after the hotel is built? I have made the point about necessity because I would have thought that when a new investor comes in, and his plan embraces a hotel complex, then in that particular hotel the plan for a casino is also inside. This investor has not applied for a license yet because he must finish the hotel first before he can apply. If he applies that time this amendment is not necessary because he will finish the hotel complex first and so there is no need to apply.

I am saying this amendment does not pass the test of necessity. Because if this amendment gets through then the observation by the Bills Committee holds water that this Bill is just to address a particular investor who has problems with land or what, I am not too sure at this point in time. This Bill only provides for the convenience of one person, as stated by the Member for North West Choiseul. This is affecting the intention of the principal Act.

In my view, I think the Minister of Home Affairs has other options at his command that he can use for purposes of extending time rather than bringing in this amendment to Parliament.

I submit to you that on the basis of the fact the investor of casino uses his hotel complex before he applies for the gaming

license for casino, this bill does not meet the test of necessity.

Therefore, that is my concern and I thank you and I resume my seat.

Hon SIKUA: Thank you Mr Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to contribute briefly to the Bill. I thank the Minister for Home Affairs for bringing the Bill to parliament.

Mr Speaker, the spirit in which this amendment is brought to Parliament is something that has taken into account what has happened in the past. The way the existing legislation stands lends itself to be broken. The period of two years as experienced is unrealistic, especially if you take into account the vagaries of what people go through in the construction industry.

In terms of what the Member for Small Malaita has said, I don't think any investor will want to take the risk of constructing the facilities first before a license is given because what guarantee does the investor have in having his application approved. I think that risk is too big. I do not think investors in their right mind will want to take that risk.

In terms of having the test of necessity, I am sure there would be other provisions in the Act for the Minister to take, but again these provision will then also be abused because they may have been used but because of the vagaries that people go through in the construction industry or any investment for that matter, this amendment is necessary. For example, a lot of time is needed for an investor to acquire a land. Also a lot of time is needed to have the plans approved and build the facilities. There is also time needed for money to be raised for the investment to take place, and there is a lot of time taken for the construction to take place. Even when construction takes place, you are at the whims of the weather. The weather might not be favorable, there might be strikes, there might be delays in the arrival of materials procured from overseas. We have to deal with reality here Mr Speaker, and the fact that the law is limiting, it is too rigid lends itself to be broken. So, we, as law makers have to be realistic and therefore amend the timing for this thing to take place.

I am usually skeptical, Mr Speaker, when we try to talk about religion and what we do with our lives. I mean whatever organization whether it be the church, the school, hospital, all need money to operate. We need money for everything that we do in life.

The same dollar that passes through the casino tables is the same dollar that gets blessed on the altar every Sunday in offerings. Is that true? Or will the Mama look at a \$50 note and say this is from the casino and so it should be put back? Is that what happens? No. So let us not talk about religion, being a Christian and those sorts of things because all of us need money.

I think the thing to realize here, Mr Speaker, is the employment opportunities made available to our people from this kind of venture is something we must also realize. Soon after the burning of the Pacific Casino, the papers were full of people that were put out of their jobs because of the burning down of the Casino. It is something that we must be mindful of.

The positive thing that we must look at in this kind of investment is that it does create employment for our people - employment for our people who do not have the skills to enter other employment opportunities in the employment sector. It does take in a certain level of people with certain level of skills. I think that is the positive thing we need to look at.

My point, Mr Speaker, is that the amendment required of us here is very simple. We amend it so that the law does not lend itself to be broken all the time, and it gives the power to the Board and the Minister to grant the period that is required.

With those few comments, Mr Speaker, I support the Bill.

Mr ZAMA: Mr Speaker, I will be very brief in my comments. I would like to thank the Minister for introducing this small amendment to the principal act. I also thank the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation committee for having seen it fit in producing this report in a timely manner so that Members are able to look through the Bill.

Mr Speaker, I support this very small and short amendment. But my points of discussion would come in a general form.

Mr Speaker, as we know, laws are simply rules by which man have to play by. And a lot of these rules (I call them rules because they are only rules called laws) are quite out of date. Some of these laws are out of time and out of taste.

A lot of things happening in this city, out on the streets and out in the corners are legal things practiced the world over. Solomon Islands, as a country, in the whole world is subjected to a lot of these activities that are going on around us. Except that there are no rules governing some of these activities and that is why they are considered as illegal or operating outside of the law.

I thank the Minister for listening to the call of Caucus by looking at the laws that apply under his jurisdiction. But I think he could have moved a little bit further on.

One other law that needs to be looked into is the Liquor Act which unnecessarily limits the time of enjoyment of our people. Just because of limitation factors that people are criminalized. I think the Minister must look into this.

Sir, I am looking at this from a liberal mind, open minded, a broad sense instead of looking at the limitations because many times people are fenced off or most of the time people would want to play and when they play they play outside of the rules. And when they play outside of the rules they are called criminals. But in reality those rules are just to make life harmonious. And if some of these rules are out of date, then that is what this Parliament is all about. We bring them in here so that we look at them and debate them.

Mr Speaker, I thank the Minister for this very short and simple amendment. But I would still call on him to have the onus of looking at the operators in here. If we are going to be making an opening here, then let us look at other enabling legislation so that we are seen as playing on a level playing field. I think that is the issue I would like to raise.

With those very short remarks, Mr Speaker, I support the Minister and I support this

very short amendment to the principal act.
Thank you very much.

Hon Ghiro: Mr Speaker, I rise to thank all those who have contributed to the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) 2006. Some of the contributions are valid and some are confusing.

Mr Speaker, I consider these as very important because of the genuineness of the operator and also the importance of our indigenous Solomon Islanders.

I think the Bill here, Mr Speaker, is very important in a sense that accomplishing an investment of \$5 to \$10million could not be completed in a period of two years. That is why this Bill is important. It is to increase the time frame so that an investor can complete his hotel complex or whatever in a set period of time. That is the importance of this Bill.

Also, Mr Speaker, employment is an important part of it because of our Solomon Islanders employees. You see what happened on 18th April can happen again if this casino is not inexistence.

The four important points are the time frame given so that the operator can complete his undertaking. The second point is that the time frame given as two years does not fall within the land issue where this casino has faced. He was not issued a land title. He just received the title last year. And so the two years is not enough. That is why the Minister is so kind in amending this bill to cater for this investor.

As mentioned by the MP for Small Malaita, the point here is that no one will risk investing his business. The same goes for an investor whether a Solomon Islander or outsider. There must be adequate time given so that you are sure to complete your undertaking before you can invest. This is simple and just commonsense.

Mr Speaker, I think all the points raised by other speakers were also answered by other speakers. And So I am not going to repeat myself because the important points have been raised.

Some of the points raised about the Bill are important. Some of the points raised, as I have said, are valid and some are confusing. Let

us not confuse ourselves on what we are saying because this amendment is very simple.

On Christianity, Mr Speaker, there were a lot of speakers saying that casino causes a lot of family problems. Mr Speaker, I must make it clear on this floor of Parliament that Christian is not joining the hearts of two men planning to do something wrong. It is an individual choice of someone from his/her own heart to decide what he/she wants to do.

The same thing applies to going to a nightclub. Who tells you to go to a nightclub? If you decide not to go to the nightclub then stay foot with your family. It is as simple as that.

What I am saying this in comparison to casino. Casino is not causing harm to any Christian person. The same thing applies to going to a nightclub, drinking kwaso. It is an individual right to decide on his/her life.

As I said earlier on, I will be very brief because other speakers have already covered the important things about this bill.

Mr Speaker, I beg to move that the Gaming and Lotteries Amendment Bill be now read the second time.

The Bill agreed to

Sitting suspended for lunch break

The Parliament resumes at 2 pm.

Committee of the Whole House

The Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006

Clause 1 agreed to

Clause 2

Hon Ghiro: Mr Speaker, I rise to move that the following amendments to the Gaming and Lotteries Bill. Delete all the words after the word "Minister" and insert instead the recommendation of the Board may by order of a gazette to grant holders of commercial gaming permits such further period as may be necessary to comply with the requirements of subsection (1)".

Mr Speaker, the amendment Bill would now read as follows: “Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (1) and (3), the Minister on the recommendation of Board, may by order publish in the gazette, grant holders of commercial gaming permits such further period as may be necessary to comply with requirements of subsection (1).

Mr Speaker, the intention of the proposed is to enable Parliament intervene under its power provided under this act.

Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

(Motion on the amendment is open for debate)

Mr Kwanairara: Mr Chairman, would that amendment confine itself to a particular investment or is it still open for the two in bracket?

Mr Chairman: The amendment now is of a general nature. It does not restrict itself to any one particular investor. Any investor who invests in this particular business would be covered by that amendment.

Hon Ghoro: Mr Chairman, this amendment is to allow the Minister to extend the time. It does not allow the Minister to have any say in the business but just to allow the Minister and also to allow the Parliament to intervene.

Mr Fono: My only concern is that this amendment is not written and distributed to Members so that we can be clear on this.

I am talking on this motion that the Minister has moved that whilst I am do not have any problem with the motion, it would have been better if that proposed amendment to this section is distributed to Members so that Members can read it and take it into the context of the whole amendment.

At the moment, just by reading it, is making it very difficult for us to understand the context of that amendment. Whilst I accept the motion in moving this amendment, it would have been better if it is written in black and white and distributed to all Members so that we are able to see the proposed amendment to this particular section.

Hon Sogavare: Mr Speaker, thank you, I would like to contribute to the debate of this motion.

I appreciate the comments raised by the Leader of Opposition. But I think it is clear in the Bill on section 6 or CAP 139 sub clause 2.

What the proposed amendment is doing is that it is replacing the entire clause and includes all the word in black, ‘may by order published in the gazette’. Those are the words included. So the new amendment instead of reading “Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (1) and (3), the Minister may on the recommendation of the Board grant holders of commercial gaming permits such further period as may be necessary to comply with the requirements of subsection (1)”. That is the original amendment. The new amendment reads, with the addition of these words, “may by order publish in the gazette, and so the new amendment will read as follows:-

Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (1) and (3), the Minister on the recommendation of the Board may by order publish in the gazette, grant holders of commercial gaming permits such further period as may be necessary to comply with requirements of subsection(1).

It is clear like that, Mr Chairman, and I support motion.

Mr Chairman: For the information of other Members of Parliament, apparently the Minister has taken on board the recommendation of the Bills and Legislation Committee, which is on page 7 the Committee’s report. If you are concerned about the language he simply accepted that amendment by the Bills Committee.

Hon Sanga: I will briefly contribute to the debate of this amendment. First of all, I would like to thank the Minister for Home Affairs for being flexible enough to consider the many concerns raised on the floor of Parliament on the general debate of the bill itself.

I think when we talk about gaming, and in particular with reference to corporate entities like the casinos, it is a matter of real concern to everybody. The fact that many Members of Parliament from both sides of the House speak on the bill this morning merely reflects that concern.

What this amendment is doing really is extending the participation of stakeholders for the general public and at the same time for Parliament to get involved in the process of determining the commercial gaming permit especially for purposes of extension can be considered or granted if recommendation is made by the Board.

My view of this is that if orders are made, the orders hopefully will be subjected to scrutiny by the Cabinet. And the fact that it will be published in the gazette will be further subjected to scrutiny by members of the public. Orders, as it were, are subsidiary legislations and obviously they will need to be tabled before Parliament. And if there are concerns made by Parliament, although the Minister has powers under this new arrangement to grant the permit, if Parliament thinks otherwise, it can intervene in the license or the permit the Minister granted under this new proposed amendment.

What I would like to say is that I think the concerns raised during the general debate this morning have been taken on board by the Minister concerned. I would like to also thank the Bills Committee for making this recommendation to improve how this new law will be taken into effect.

With these few comments, I would like to support the amendment bill.

Hon Ghiro: Mr Speaker, I wish to thank all MPs for their very effective contribution and also for understanding the amendment.

With this, I beg to move the motion.

The amendment agreed to

Clause 2 with the amendment agreed to

The Preamble agreed to

(Parliament resumes)

Hon Ghiro: Mr Speaker, I beg to report that the Gaming and Lotteries Amendment Bill 2006 has gone through the committee of the whole house with amendments.

Bills – Third Reading

The Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2006

Hon Ghiro: Mr Speaker, I beg to move that the Gaming and Lotteries Amendment Bill 2006 with amendments be now read the third time and do pass.

The Bill passed its third reading

Mr Speaker: I understand the Minister for Foreign Affairs would like to make a statement before we go on to the motion.

Hon OTI: Thank you Mr Speaker, for granting me leave under Standing Order 34 to make a ministerial statement regarding what has been reported in the media today.

Mr Speaker, the Government would like to clarify that we have been informed that the Attorney General who was held in Port Moresby over the last week or so has now found his way through Solomon Islands and has landed in Munda this morning.

Mr Speaker, there has been a full briefing with the Commissioner of Police and other core authorities including Immigration Officials, and the matter is now in the hands of the Police.

Mr Speaker, also I have called the Papua New Guinea High Commissioner to my office after Parliament this afternoon to find out and express to him the concerns of the Solomon Islands Government. Unfortunately, as usually required, there was no diplomatic clearance of the reported military light aircraft which brought in the Attorney General.

As of this afternoon, it is now within the hands of the Police to take care of Mr Moti, if I can mention the name, and he will now be subjected to the Immigration laws of this country including the breach of the Passport Act.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: That is a Minister's statement and is not open to debate. But short questions can be asked.

Mr Fono: Mr Speaker, according to section 24(2) can I ask a question to the Minister.

Mr Speaker: Yes, you may ask short questions.

Mr Fono: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Speaker. Can the Minister inform the House as to who will meet the cost of the plane that brought this person from Port Moresby to Munda?

Hon Oti: Mr Speaker, that in essence is why I have called the High Commissioner so that he is questioned how the plane came and who is going to pay the cost. So that would be made known to us. But at the moment what are we concerned about is breaching of the laws of this country and he will now be subject to the full brunt of our legal laws.

Its financial consideration is a matter that is now before the Papua New Guinea Government through its High Commission here for us to be informed. .

Mr Fono: Mr Speaker, I would like to know whether his appointment is still valid or not so that he comes to Solomon Islands to take up the post?

Hon Sanga: Mr Speaker, I think that question is a little bit beside the point since it has to do with the person concerned. I would like to confirm that the appointment per se is still intact.

MOTIONS

Sine Die Motion

Hon SOGAVARE: Mr Speaker, I beg to move that at the adjournment of Parliament on the 11th October 2006 the present meeting shall be concluded and Parliament shall then stand adjourned *sine die*. I will be brief and to the point, as I will have the opportunity to round up the motion after it is debated on.

In moving this motion, Mr Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to make some explanations on the actions of the government, which were clearly taken out of context by certain people including Members of this Honourable House, which resulted in barrages of unfounded allegations against the Government.

But before that, I would like to start by thanking a number of people who contributed

significantly in making the present meeting worthwhile. Firstly, of course, I thank His Excellency, the Governor General for gracing this House with his presence to deliver the Speech from the Throne.

Yes, as recognized by all who spoke for the motion to thank His Excellency, it has been quite sometime since Parliament had the honour of hearing an address from the representative of the Head of State of Solomon Islands and therefore in that context, the event was rightly described by some Members of Parliament as historical.

On behalf of the people of this country and of course this Parliament, I extend to His Excellency our warm and heartfelt words of appreciation, thanks and we wish His Excellency and Lady Waena the richness of God's blessings and good health.

Mr Speaker, I would like to assure His Excellency that the Grand Coalition for Change Government is committed to take custody of Her Majesty's Government in the bounds of the rule of law to respect constitutional established institutions and to ensure that our constitutional rights are protected and respected, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to extend the Government's profound words of appreciation to the Head of the Judiciary, the Honourable Chief Justice of Solomon Islands, for gracing this House as well with his presence during the delivery by His Excellency of the Speech from the Throne. Indeed, the occasion brought together the heads of the three arms of Government which is very encouraging.

I would urge your office, Sir, to take the suggestion that the Honorable, the Chief Justice made privately to you and I that it would be nice during such occasion that the House is also graced by members of the Bar Association, of course in full legal attire. After all, it is the legal fraternity that helps interpret the many laws that passed through this Honourable house.

Of course, I would also like to thank your office and that of the Clerk for the excellent arrangements that contributed tremendously to the smooth order of this meeting.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to thank the Permanent Secretaries and the Public Servants for their unwavering support of government and the development strategies we

are advancing for this country. The Public Service is very often unfairly criticized by politicians without a slightest appreciation for all the pressures they have to go through amidst all the politics that are going on.

The same goes for the Permanent Secretaries, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister was criticized for handpicking them since the commencement of this present sitting by certain Members of the Opposition, and this House continued to complain about this matter.

Sir, there seems to be the argument that the Government is grossly careless and is replacing Permanent Secretaries left, right and centre and with people who are incompetent. The same people also complained about the engagement of a non-indigenous Solomon Island citizen as the Secretary to Prime Minister.

Sir, I want to challenge this so-called protector of good governance and advocates of human rights to be genuine. I am saying this because I guess I am sick and tired of hypocrisy. These very people, of course, would not hesitate for one moment to advance racist agendas when it suits them and dare to advance themselves, as having concern for good governance and all it entails Mr. Speaker.

The problem with some of us, Mr. Speaker is that we quickly suffer from serious memory loss. There is a tendency for people to speak before they think. I would advise all of us to grow up. I would like to ask this question how dare we brand Solomon Islanders new Permanent Secretaries as incompetent and cronies of the government. That is not right.

For the information of this House, Mr. Speaker and any one else who may be aggrieved by the action of selecting the new team of Permanent Secretaries, I want to make it clear that I have no other interest other than the interest of state in the selection of the Permanent Secretaries. All of them are qualified Solomon Islanders who are willing and committed to do something to help the government achieve its objectives.

I am amused by the attitude of some of us who would like to treat the government as our property even when we are not in government and we take the appointment of the Permanent Secretaries as if they are appointments to our own companies, and we complain about them.

Sir, there is also the tendency that every appointment to important posts in the government must be tainted with cronyism and corruption. Sir, I just want us to come off that. Just think of how can the government be careless of its appointment of Permanent Secretaries or anyone else for that matter. That would be akin to, I guess, committing suicide.

The fact of the matter is that it is in the interest of the government that we deliver on our election promises and because of that fact we must ensure that the people appointed to the posts are people we trust who can make it happen for the government. In any case, the Ministers were fully consulted on the appointments. Interestingly, more than 80% of the current Permanent Secretaries were reappointments.

Sir, I would also like to express my disappointment at the way, I guess some of our very senior politicians, are behaving themselves. All the politicking that is going on during the present sitting is clearly engineered by senior politicians, and this makes me sad. This is not right.

I am appalled of what I would like to describe as very childish attitude. Senior politicians have a duty of care for the newcomers in this House. The way we debate issues and how we conduct ourselves are read like open books by our new Members.

In my view, these are the last people that I expect us to act irresponsibly. To be honest, I hope the stability of this government with the new Members of Parliament would not take any non-sense of the so-called experienced politicians from both sides of the House.

There is a determined effort I observed by some Members of this Honourable House to pull this government down. Like I understand the memorandum of understanding is openly circulated to get people to sign up on what I see as a very evil agenda. Thank God, Mr. Speaker, this determination is equaled by the determination of our new Members to stand for principles and what is right for this country. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the steadfastness and commissioning of the Members to the mission of this government.

I want to take this opportunity to let the people of this country know that this government is committed to its mission and will not be deterred by the evil agendas of a very few individuals in this House. We are determined not to disappoint the people of this country. (A little later I will comment very briefly on the intended motion of no confidence).

Sir, I guess much is said about ethical leadership. I find it very amusing when people who advanced this concern relate it very narrowly, and for very obvious reasons to the way the Prime Minister is handling our relationship with Australia, and in doing so we confuse ethical leadership with strong and determined leadership.

To put any speculation to rest we make no apologies whatsoever for the actions we took as a government. Contrary to what the Opposition group is telling the world that the Prime Minister was taking his actions on his own accord and therefore a dictator. The Cabinet and Caucus are consulted and so this Prime Minister is not stupid.

I am fully aware of the principles of Cabinet/Government system and the need to consult. If that is all we know about ethical leadership then no wonder we are confused ourselves. Ethical leadership must be viewed in this context if we are to make any sense of perceived actions and behavior.

A perfect example is the demonstration of determination by the Prime Minister in the way he handles the current issues, which is misconstrued by all people as stubbornness, eccentric, madness and the list of adjectives goes on. The problem with a lot of us is that we jump straight to the trees and we missed the forest. We judge issues by our feelings and perceptions rather than facts and truths. We allow our egos to be fueled by misinformation, fabrication, hyped up by media propaganda to a point where we find it difficult to recant when we have proven to be misinformed. So much for ethical leadership.

Sir, this is clearly demonstrated in the way some of Members of this House especially the Opposition Group and their sympathizers I guess are determined to make this Prime Minister look like a criminal, and surprisingly in support of alien agendas.

As explained by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in a statement issued on the floor of this Parliament there is a determined effort by the Australian Government to frustrate the Commission of Inquiry. That was clearly stated and we have proved to that effect in conversations that we have with the Australian authorities.

Sir, this is an issue that the Grand Coalition for Change will not back up because as explained that policy is an integral part of a comprehensive piece strategy of this government and nothing will move the government to abandon it. All other actions are intrinsically related to protect the integrity of the Commission of Inquiry and that includes some controversial appointments.

Given the above explanation, Mr Speaker, this side of the House cannot understand the attitude of Canberra on this matter.

For the information of this Honourable House, Mr Speaker, the Commission of Inquiry was established in the name of good governance, transparency, accountability, the very principles that are advanced by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands in this country.

Sir, by continuing to undermine the Commission of Inquiry Canberra appears to demonstrate double standards. If transparency would support their cause then it is all right. If it means it will expose weaknesses then it must be ruled as criminal. It makes me sad as leader of this government. Likewise when the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands and his Cabinet are determined to protect the integrity of the Commission of Inquiry they are branded as enemies of Australia and therefore must be voted out of office. I begin to ask the question whether we are still all right.

To prove, Mr Speaker, that they will stop at nothing to frustrate the Commission of Inquiry they are now trumping up a new position based on a leaked Cabinet paper to the Solomon Star newspaper. They are now saying that the reason for the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry is to facilitate the release of the two Members of Parliament. This is laughable. I sympathize with the person who may have leaked secret Cabinet papers, which in itself is a serious breach of confidentiality, but they would

not care because it serves their purpose, a perfect example of what I referred to as blatant hypocrisy.

That issue aside, it is a fuss over nothing. If they have an understanding of the decision making process in Cabinet Government system, they would realize that confidential memorandum by Ministers are nothing more than personal views of Ministers concerned, and that view is subject to the decision of the Cabinet. It is Cabinet decision that matters on any issue ultimately.

I am raising this matter because I just read the papers that come from abroad and I have it right here. There are plans to raid the Prime Minister's residence because of this leaked paper and the allegation is that the Prime Minister is using the Commission of Inquiry to release the two MPs in prison. I find that very, very insulting and a slap on the face of this government and what it stands for. We will stop at nothing to frustrate the work of the inquiry.

Sir, if that is not enough, this side of the House is seriously concerned that the sponsors of the vote of no confidence motion are now using threats to get Ministers and government backbenchers to switch side, and a statement to this effect will be made on the floor of this Parliament. The nature of the threat is if the Members and the Ministers concerned do not change side they will be arrested for their alleged involvement in the Honiara riots.

This is a sign of desperation, Mr Speaker, an evil strategy indeed. It is not straight. If you want to win argument on issues, use the issues and do not use evil strategies like that because it is not straight.

But the real motive of the motion is to just remove the leader but the government will continue. So we are not surprised because that is exactly what Canberra wants. Why? Is it for standing up for the sovereign right of my Country, Mr Speaker? Is it for defending an important program of the government that is concerned with the future of this country? Come on, grow up!

There is also a lot of concern by the Opposition Group that the stand off might affect Australian bilateral, and Australian funded regional aid assistance to Solomon Islands. The Government fully appreciates that concern. We

are a situation here that we need to uphold the sovereign rights of the country against that issue and we expect the Government of Australia to understand where to draw the line.

The issue with aid assistance from this particular aid donor is not that Solomon Islanders does not appreciate it. No! Our concern is that we do not want Solomon Islands to be used as a venue for international cronyism. I have a document here to prove what I will be saying this afternoon. This is a serious concern to this government and we are not making statements anyhow in the media when we talk about this issue.

If aid donors want to help this country then please be genuine with us. It would be very interesting to see how these people would react if we show them the true impact of such aid assistance from this particular donor to Solomon Islands including the ones channeled through the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands.

Sir, I am raising these issues because I was attacked personally, not only by the media people here in Solomon Islands but also by the Foreign Affairs Minister of Australia. Sir, it is just unfortunate that there are people who are so entrenched in aid dependency that to move away from would mean the end of the world for them.

Sir, I want to make some very important positions clear here as far as Solomon Islands is concerned in aid assistance.

Firstly, if aid donors think that Solomon Islands will be blackmailed into sacrificing the principles of good governance, they better think again. We are not that cheap. We are not.

In fact I am insulted by the comments that beggars have no choice. We should think more seriously on statements like that. We have no beggars in this country. Anyone who is hungry here can just go and dig the cassava and plant potato and other crops in the garden to eat. Anyone who wants fish can jump into the sea. So that statement is very insulting and is not right.

Sir, I'm not saying that Solomon Islands does not need aid money. I did not say that. That is not what I am saying. What I am saying is that if aid donors are willing to give us aid then be honest with us. That is all we want. Aid must have as its ultimate objective the

alleviation of poverty and the improvement of people's lives, that is people living in the aid receiving country, and in this case Solomon Islands. This is what we are hearing but this intention is not apparent in the way the aid money is administered in Solomon Islands.

Unfortunately so much is said about aid assistance and this particular donor under the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands arrangement and bilateral arrangement, very little is actually spent in Solomon Islands. I make no apologies whatsoever for making that statement. It is a fact that we can prove.

In the case of this particular aid donor to Solomon Islands, Canberra is very, very clear about its objectives, and I have documents to prove that here. And I quote: "According to research, aid is not directed to promoting sustainable development or at alleviating poverty but its primary role openly acknowledge by AUSAID is to promote Australia's national interest". That is serious, that is very, very serious and it only goes to prove the things you have been saying.

We talk about big, big figures. If aid and the million dollars we have been talking about are coming into the country it would have improved this economy. There is double tragedy here because all these assistances are by way of human resources. We made a mistake. I do not know intentionally or forced to do it. We even exempted them from paying tax.

The international law, the Convention on Taxation is that you pay tax where services are rendered. This is a poor country and if they recognize that this is a country that needs that help then pay tax here.

A rough calculation if they are paying tax it is more than \$100million in income tax, import duties on goods they are bringing into the country. That is all we are asking. If you say 'Helpem fren' then be genuine with us.

The report goes on to say, "What this equates is a boomerang effect that sees the majority of aid money - 80% flowing back to a small number of Australian companies and the people of the developing world get left behind". In fact companies like, and mentioned in the report are ACRL, GRM, AC SMEC and ... end of quote. I can go on M. Speaker and talk about this matter but I guess I made my mind.

Secondly, Solomon Islands must come out, and it is us are sitting down here, I am talking to, we must come out of aid dependency syndrome if we want to move forward in sustaining our development. We must do it. The development strategy of this country for the last 28 years has been aid dependency. That is how we advance this country's development. Just look at us after 28 years. That is what I am saying. If we want to take this country forward then come out of the aid dependency syndrome, and it makes me sick to hear people talking in this Parliament saying we need aid very much. We need it but not depend on it.

I am quite surprised, as I've said, of a number of politicians who would not come out of this strategy. They would rather remain as slaves than puppets to aid donors.

Talk about sovereignty, talk about the rights of our people, talk about the bottom up and we are complacent. We are saying the bottom up will not work because aid donors will not help us. Of course, they are very concern about it because it is about helping people right in the rural areas by strengthening them, empowering them economically. That is exactly what others do not want. If you are economically independent you do not need them. People are afraid of the strategy this government is putting forward.

Just look at this country, we are victims of aid management strategy by aid donors since we became a nation. We are carried away with huge amounts of munitions. Are you saying \$1billion comes from and other billion comes from there and yet we forget to do something for ourselves. We become dependants. This syndrome also creates a careless attitude in developing countries as clearly manifested in the pathetic way we are managing our natural resources.

Despite of this we continue to be parasites. I guess what I am saying here is if we are to take this country forward we must learn now to grow out of aid the dependency syndrome. If not we will continue to remain the same again for the next 28 years. This is why this country is serious about facilitating Solomon Islanders themselves doing something for themselves. All the ingredients are there in the country because resources belong to the

people, they are in the hands of the people and it is managed under the customary land tenure system. That is strength. We look negatively at the customary land tenure system saying it is a hindrance to development. And this government is seriously looking at a reform that appreciates our customary land tenure system. We will implement it as soon as it is finished.

Mr. Speaker, aid is becoming an effective instrument of foreign control. 'You do as I say or lose aid'. Come on Solomon Islands, we must open our eyes and see what is happening to this country. Some of us, I guess have been looking very hard on it and it hurts us, (heart sore) to think about things like that.

Sir, the Foreign Affairs Minister has made a Statement on the floor of Parliament as to how the government views the recent events that relate to the principal advisor of the government. Sir, there are concerns raised and I fully appreciate them – statements and concerns raised which do not fall on deaf ears.

The problem here is that we have some serious principle to take care of as well and when they see the government as being stubborn. Even in the newspapers on letters to the editor they are saying is the PM okay or what. I do not blame them for such statements because that is how it is perceived from outside.

As I said already there are merits in those concerns. Clouded by the fact is the concern that he is a foreign lawyer and we should be engaging our own Solomon Islands lawyer. I appreciate that as well but that concern is actually clouded by the fact that the Solomon Islands Public Service at this point in time is inundated with foreigners and so that argument does not hold water as it is not right. The argument about foreigners must stop. If we are concerned about foreigners then join us and we chase the foreigners away. That argument must fall flat on its face. It is not right. It cannot hold water.

The issue here, as I am going to tell you the government's position is no longer the person concerned. It is no longer him. In fact he is dispensable. They can get rid of him tomorrow. But as I have said there are serious principles that are at stake here. What is making this case so important, not only to Solomon Islands but to the world is because it is a direct

attack on the very foundation of the justice system of a sovereign state. That is a serious issue. It is concerned with our duty to respect the constitutionally established institution, and in this case the court system. That is the principle at stake here.

It is ironic that a central argument advanced by Canberra in all its dealings with Solomon Islands is the respect for the judicial system. But it is really surprising that in this case they are prepared to rubbish the very system they protect. This is hypocrisy in its blatant form and calls into question our motives.

Mr Speaker, Solomon Islands, under the leadership of this Prime Minister *will not* allow Solomon Islands to travel down that path. No, not at all because that would amount to a direct attack on the judicial system of a sovereign nation called Vanuatu. The court system of Vanuatu has already cleared this person but we are bringing up the issues he has been cleared of. I just cannot understand this. I cannot put one to one on this. This is really not right to me.

Sir, I do not have the intention to cover all the areas the Opposition may be concerned about, and since I am going to wind up this motion I will respond on issues that will be raised at the debate of this motion.

Mr Speaker, I would like to end right here and beg to move that at the adjournment of Parliament on Wednesday 11th October 2006 the present meeting shall be concluded and Parliament shall then stand adjourned sine die. Thank you very much.

(Debate on the motion is now open)

Hon Sogavare: I beg to move that debate on the Motion of Sine Die be adjourned until tomorrow.

The debate adjourned for tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 3 pm