

## **MONDAY, 13<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2014**

The Parliament met at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### **PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

### **MINUTES**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Minutes of the sittings of Parliament held on Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> October and Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2014, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. COMMANDER S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	48
Absent	-	2

Motion agreed to.

### **TIME LIMIT ON HIS EXCELLENCY'S ADDRESS**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT:- Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That pursuant to Standing Order 68(1), a time limit be imposed on the debate in reply to the Address of His Excellency the President, on the following terms and conditions:

- a) The debate will take precedence of all other businesses and continue until all Members wishing to speak have been called.
- b) Such debate shall commence on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2014.
- c) Each day the Parliament shall commence sitting at 9.30am and rise at 12.30pm and resume at 2.30pm and rise at 4.30pm. Madam Speaker shall, in her discretion, allocate time for tea breaks during the morning and afternoon sittings.
- d) Of the time available for the debate, the mover of the motion and all other Members shall each be allowed twenty minutes.

- e) The speaking order shall be in alphabetical order after the Mover of the Motion, the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition have spoken.
- f) Any infringement of the terms of this motion shall be deemed to constitute a breach of the Standing Orders of the Parliament and Madam Speaker shall be entitled to order the offender to cease speaking.

Madam Speaker, I commend the motion to the House.

HON. COMMANDER S.T. KOROILAVESAU. – Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes – 48

Absent - 2

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR**

MADAM SPEAKER.– Before we carry on, we have an apology from honourable Jone Usamate, which probably accounts for the extra one that is not accounted for. There been 48 Ayes in the Question, the Question is resolved in the affirmative.

Before calling on the next item of Business, I would like to advise honourable Members that whilst Standing Order 65 prohibits the reading of speeches, it is my intention not to enforce the Standing Order during the debate on the Motion of Thanks for His Excellency's Address.

Given that the large majority of Members are new and this will be their inaugural speech to Parliament, I feel that it is not unreasonable for such latitude to be allowed on this occasion. A bell will be rung for five minutes before the Member's time expires, and again, at one minute before full time. I trust that Parliament concurs with my views on this matter.

### **DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT**

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (Ret) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.– Madam Speaker, I move that this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for His most gracious Address.

It is a great honour for me to make my maiden speech as Prime Minister in this Parliament, having led the FijiFirst movement to victory in last month's General Election.

Talking about victory, I wish to formally congratulate our Rugby Sevens Team for their magnificent victory over Samoa last night, to win in the Gold Coast Sevens IRB World Cup Series. Well done men and Ben Ryan, you have done Fiji proud! Your victory was the icing on the cake after the successful launch of Parliament last week and the Fiji Day Celebrations.

Madam Speaker, allow me to congratulate you on your election as Speaker. The fact that you are the first female Speaker of the Parliament in Fiji or any other Parliament in the Pacific Islands is a

huge personal achievement. However, it is also highly symbolic - a milestone in the history of our nation and in the advancement of Fijian women for equal rights and opportunities.

Your speech of acceptance last week was a wonderful moment because as you rightly pointed out, the fact that you have assumed this high Office will undoubtedly encourage other Fijian women to consider careers in politics. I am sure that all the honourable Members of Parliament join me in wishing you every success in your role as Speaker. You can be assured of Government's full co-operation in this Chamber, and in the conduct of the Parliament's affairs.

Madam Speaker, I am also sure that every honourable Member in this Chamber will agree with me when I say that our two days in the Chamber last week were unforgettable. We have launched our new democracy with dignity and with style. As His Excellency the President reminded us, that our ultimate duty as Members of Parliament is to the people who sent us here, and I know from the feedback I have been receiving that what they saw here filled them with pride and optimism for our future.

As His Excellency also reminded us, this is the Chamber that has seen some of the greatest movements in our history and also some of the worst. There are mercifully a few Parliaments in the world where shots have been fired into the ceiling yet, that was what happened in this Chamber on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1987 during the first *coup*.

I think we all share His Excellency's view that there is something deeply symbolic about having brought history full circle by returning to this Chamber. Let us all resolve to draw a line under the past and work together to achieve the future we all know awaits us, if we put our nation first.

I want to pay special tribute to those who have worked so hard over the past few months to carry out the refurbishment of this Chamber and the rest of the Parliamentary Complex: the architects, designers, contractors and the many men and women who worked day and night to complete the project on time and to such a high standard. It is a wonderful achievement and to all of you, I extend the nation's thanks.

Madam Speaker, much of my Government's legislative programme for the coming season was outlined by His Excellency the President in his Address while opening the 2014 Parliament. There are many more details to come in the 2015 Budget next month, but as His Excellency signalled, one of our main priorities will be to provide more assistance to Fijians who are disadvantaged. I personally feel very strongly that we must not rest as a Government or a nation while any Fijian is marginalised. That is why, along with our programme to improve our infrastructure, we have put so much emphasis assisting ordinary Fijians and families who are disadvantaged.

I have said before that my proudest achievement in Government has been to free struggling families from the worry of having to pay for their children's education because in my own life, I have witnessed the heartbreak of many ordinary Fijians in not being able to meet the cost of school fees. Heartbreaking because we have always known that education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty, and not getting a proper education has condemned successive generations to lives of menial work, meagre incomes, drudgery and not being able to improve their socio-economic status.

When I was growing up, we all knew children who were less fortunate and got left behind through no fault of their own, simply because their parents could not afford to provide for them in the way we were being provided for. If it is the only thing I do in government, then I will be happy knowing that we were able, through our free schooling programme, to place Fijian children in a much better position than previous generations. I ask all of you in this Chamber to work with me to put our

children and young people first, to support those measures that we have planned - to improve the lives of our young people, broaden their horizons and open up the world of opportunity that awaits them, if we join hands to give them the leg up that they deserve.

Madam Speaker, if everyone in this Parliament ask themselves the question, "Will this be good for our young people?" and the answer is "yes", then let us not allow political differences to get in the way of working together to make that initiative happen. As I have said before, I intend to run an inclusive government, I intend to leave no Fijian behind, so I am extending a sincere invitation to my political opponents, especially the honourable Leader of the Opposition, to work with me to improve the prospects of every Fijian, especially our young people.

By all means, they can and they must critique our policies. That is their role in our parliamentary democracy, just as it is in other countries but do not do it simply for the sake of it. We must all, and I ask them to work with and support all policies that are for the good of the nation. We must all, and I ask them to put the interest of our young people above politics because assisting our youth is the key to developing a stronger and more educated nation. Assisting them is an investment in a better Fiji, and assisting them means a stable and prosperous Fiji.

Madam Speaker, it is traditionally maiden speeches to thank those who have made an impact on our lives, especially those who have imbued us with the notion of service in public life. First and foremost, I want to pay tribute to my wife, Mary, who has always been a pillar of strength to me and a wise and trusted counsellor. She never dreamt that she would wind up as a politician's wife but she was a wonderful asset in the recent campaign in reaching out to ordinary people who got to see us as I have always seen her. I want to thank her for the unwavering love and support, and for always being by my side.

I also want to thank my six children and 14 grandchildren, who provided me with so much joy. They would have caused more joy on the way with number 15. As we all know, there is no substitute for a happy family life and I have been blessed beyond measure.

Today, I also think of my parents, who imbued me with the values I hold dear: of love for family, love of community and love of country. I grew up – thanks largely to them and the teachers at Marist Brothers High School, who committed to the notion of Fiji as one big multiracial family in which everyone belongs to and everyone deserves equal treatment.

I have always tried to see my fellow citizens through the prism of their own personality and character rather than their ethnic background or religious belief. It does not matter to me who you are or what you believe in, what is important to me is whether you are honest, courageous, compassionate, stand up for what is right, protect the vulnerable and treat the people the way you would like to be treated yourself with consideration and respect.

I passionately believe in one Fiji in which everyone belongs and no one gets left behind, and I passionately believe in being patriotic – putting our nation's interests before ourselves and defending our unity as a nation against those who wish to divide us, which is why I always want to pay tribute today to my colleagues in the Military. History will eventually make some pronouncements on the events of 2006 but those of us in the Military, who passionately believe in national unity, came to the conclusion that the fabric of our nation was unravelling, and that the only radical intervention would enable us to pick up the threads.

We had all gone through the trauma of 2000 and the Mutiny in our hands that had caused us so much pain. None of us wanted to remove the civilians we had appointed to take our nation forward,

but when it appeared that they had precisely the same racists and corrupt agenda as the instigators of 2000, we had no choice. We took the tough decision necessary to keep Fiji united - we prevented large numbers of our people from being relegated to second or third class citizens, halted the spiralling out of control corruption and elitism, and began the task of reforming our society from the ground up.

Only a radical intervention in 2006 was capable of getting Fiji back on track, of establishing once and for all, the universal democratic principle that all men and women are equal. Before 2006, that was simply not the case in Fiji but now it is, and we have a Constitution that not only guarantees genuine equality and democracy, but also provides Fijians with a range of unprecedented socio-economic rights. It puts in place institutions that will not only address the issue of systematic corruption, but also provide unprecedented levels of accountability and transparency in public life and institutions.

I want to thank the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) for supporting the reform process of carrying out its duty to be the ultimate guarantor of our national security, of holding Fiji together and for the personal support I received as Commander from those around me, those patriots who shared my vision of a united Fiji. It was a great wrench for me to leave the Military earlier this year. Everyone who knew me also know that I never wanted to be a politician but I came to realise that I had a duty, to lead us forward, to introduce a genuine democracy instead of the pale imitation we had, to lead the fight against corruption, tackle the self-serving elites and offer a vision of an inclusive nation with fairness and justice for all.

I want to thank all of those who shared that vision, the countless thousands who understood what needed to be done, including those sitting beside me on this side of the House. We share a common love of Fiji and a vision of where we want to take it with the support of the Fijian people.

I especially want to thank those individuals who head our institutions of State for the sacrifices they were prepared to make in the face of criticism, abuse and sanctions. Some of those whom we counted as our friends, set out to degrade our standards of governance by targeting and punishing those individuals, who accepted positions in the Judiciary, as Ministers and on the Boards of our State-Owned Enterprises. To those of you who withstood vilification and in some cases even death threats, I also extend my warmest thanks. I will never forget your loyalty to our nation, and our cause of building a better Fiji.

I particularly thank the members of our Judiciary: the Judges and Magistrates headed by honourable Chief Justice, Anthony Gates; for being willing to stand up to international condemnation, so that the Fijian people could continue to access to justice. I especially thank those who came from Sri Lanka to join other Judges and Magistrates, who stood by our nation when we needed them. Because of these heroes, the genuine rule of law in Fiji prevailed, even during the most challenging times and we owe you all an immense depth of gratitude. We owe an immense debt to the Government and President of Sri Lanka for facilitating their services to Fiji.

I also want to thank our friends in the international community, those nations and individuals who took the trouble to understand that what we were doing was not for ourselves but for the common good, and stood by us. Those nations who tried to bring us to kneel and impose their will on us, failed. We were made of sterner stuff than they appreciated, and instead of complying with their demand that we restore the status quo and resolve nothing, we went out to the world and found new friends. Instead of harming us, they actually made us stronger, so instead of being resentful of these nations, we thank them.

Because of them, Fiji actually stands taller in the world than ever before. They tried to get us dispensed as UN peacekeepers, but not only did their lobbying failed, we are in more demand than

ever before. The recent detention of 45 of our soldiers in Syria showed the world what we have always known ourselves, that when the going gets tough, Fijian troops stay professional, disciplined and courageous.

They can be relied upon when others cannot and their equally courageous families can be relied on to support them, to endure the separation from their loved ones and accept that this is Fiji's contribution to the world, of being a good, global citizen. To all those families, I also want to say, "thank you" and convey how much we all value the sacrifices you are making.

Most of all, I want to thank the Fijian people for putting their trust in me at the ballot box last month, to move us all forward. The scale of the FijiFirst victory in the Elections surprised a lot of people, certainly those sitting on the other side, and a large number of diplomats, NGOs and elements of the media. However, it did not surprise me at all.

I have always made it a point to listen to the Fijian people and try to understand their needs and concerns, respecting their views and doing what I can to assist them. Without being arrogant about it, I have had my finger on the pulse of the nation for the past eight years. I knew what ordinary people really wanted and that is, an end to the constant bickering and self interest in public life, the continual jockeying for power and a Government that genuinely serves the people.

Every Fijian of goodwill wants a level playing field in Fiji. They want:

- a) fairness and justice for all;
- b) a Government to provide them with the tangible things they need to improve their lives with;
- c) a job or another source of income;
- d) food on the table;
- e) their children to get a better education and to have opportunities they never had;
- f) to get on with their neighbours;
- g) a freedom to decide their religious beliefs;
- h) a tolerant society in which their own choices are respected;
- i) to feel good about their country;
- j) to be in one nation, not a collection of competing tribes, communal groups and interests;
- k) Fiji to assume its rightful place as the prominent Pacific Island nation and a beacon of good governance and hope for our smaller neighbours; and
- l) to be citizens of the world, for our education revolution to transform the lives of our young people and for Fiji to become known as a clever country.

Madam Speaker, that is the vision that honourable Members on this side of the House offered the Fijian people at this Election and that is what we intend to deliver. We will work as hard as we can to keep the trust they have placed in us.

Indeed, I have told my Ministers and Members that we can relent, we cannot take it easy. The people have spoken and our new democracy has been launched. It must translate into very real and tangible benefits for all citizens of our nation. I can assure every Fijian that this is only the beginning. Now that we are united and we have a Government that cares and has genuine love and affection for all Fijians, even greater days lie ahead.

May God bless us all. May God bless Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu* and I thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Acclamation)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to give thanks to His Excellency for his most gracious speech and in so doing, I would also like to place on record my sincere thanks to all the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) members here in Fiji and abroad, who exercised their right to vote in the recent Elections and place their trust in me and my colleagues on this side of the House.

I congratulate the honourable Members on the other side of the House on their success, and I extend my congratulations to your good-self, Madam Speaker, on your appointment and that of the honourable Deputy Speaker.

I would also like to congratulate the Fiji Sevens Team for winning the IRB Gold Coast Sevens, and wish them well for the lead up to Rio De Janeiro.

Madam Speaker, there is an air of optimism in Fiji today and depending on which side of the political divide one sits, the expectations of the people will vary. For ourselves, since 5th December, 2006, we never had more voice. We were made invisible; we were a non-entity; we were not even second-class citizens and we had very little rights. Today, almost eight years later, through the Elections which we view as a victory against all odds, we have been given a voice - all 18 of us in Opposition.

We are visible once again, Madam Speaker. We look forward to the restoration of all our rights, and best of all, through the thousands of people who voted for us. We can debate our country's laws to take us forward to hopefully true democracy. For most of our people, I am sure, Madam Speaker, their hope is that Monday, 6th October, 2014 signals the end of dictatorships, oppression and suppression, and the beginning of an accountable and transparent governance in Fiji, for the first time in almost eight years. This is certainly what my colleagues and I on this side of the House hope for, and I have no doubt that those who voted for us also look forward to this and as Members of the Opposition, we are ready to play our part to deliver this to our people.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's Address was wide ranging and while my colleagues will all touch on various aspects, allow me to comment briefly on a few.

His Excellency spoke on the significance of the 44 year history of this Chamber and the momentous events that took place here, as well as the names of some of the great leaders who have gone before us yet, our Deed of Cession history was not even mentioned in the 2013 Constitution. Although according to the pomp, pageantry and ceremony that we witnessed on Friday, 10th October, 2014, this is an important date in our country's calendar. So, why is there no inclusion in the 2013 constitution? Something does not quiet add up. This begs the question as to, who really is the author of the 2013 Constitution?

Madam Speaker, I was pleased that His Excellency made reference to the most traumatic and painful events in our history, and agreed that the pain lingers with us three decades later. I am glad he referred to the cycle of instability that the *coups* have plagued our nation with and retarded our development. Allow me to add, Madam Speaker, that experts place the cost of these *coups* to our people and this nation at more than \$10 billion. Yes, Madam Speaker, more than \$10 billion.

Madam Speaker, what His Excellency omitted to say was that, '*coups*' cannot occur or succeed in this country unless the Military is involved and we, therefore, look to the new Military Commander to return our Military back to the professional and disciplined force it once was, and to recommit itself to acting in defence of our people and not against them.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Hear, hear!

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, I believe the question of transparency and accountability of this parliamentary process is something that, in time, will reveal for itself.

Madam Speaker, I now refer to His Excellency's reference to the planned increase from \$2 per hour to \$2.32 effective from 1st July, 2015, for the minimum wage rate for all workers in Fiji. This is a 16 per cent increase and workers have to wait for nine months until 1st July, 2015, before it comes into effect. Yet, the Government does not hesitate to reward themselves with increases in salaries of the last elected Government.

That said, Madam Speaker, with regards to His Excellency's call for all sides of this Chamber to work together for the good of the nation, I can say, on behalf of the Members on this side of the House, that we stand ready to 'engage' with Government, and we are willing to work towards creating a united Fiji for all.

HON. RATU N. LALABALAVU.-That is true.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, all political parties made promises during the Elections to alleviate the oppressive high cost of food currently bearing down on the majority of our people.

Madam Speaker, as Leader of the Opposition, I call on all Members of Parliament to work together and introduce immediate measures that will bring the much needed relief that our people so desperately need. We, in Opposition, look forward to working with Government to resolving this issue as a matter of urgency. So, I commend to the Government our proposal for a \$50 million subsidy as a starting point, to ease the cost of living for our people.

Madam Speaker, we all appreciate that education is important to Fiji's future and I wish to acknowledge Government's continuation for free education to primary, secondary and what I believe, Madam Speaker, is the inclusion of SODELPA's Manifesto in extending free education to pre-school students from Term 2 of 2015. Perhaps, the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts may, in his maiden speech, clarify what is meant by "free education".

Madam Speaker, a modern trend of education is to introduce into the system of teaching and learning, a more focussed formative learning and a lesser concentration on summative. The fact that Classroom Based Assessment or CBA has been implemented in the Fiji Education System is a positive steps towards the slogan known as a "no one is left out". However, Madam Speaker, an appraisal system is now warranted to find out the benefits and non-benefits of this CBA. A lot of rather negative comments have been forthcoming from parents, teachers and the community at large, about this latest development in the Ministry of Education, that whilst it is classroom-based, the spill over is taken home where everyone contributes to the effort, which is then passed off as the child's completed task and graded accordingly.

Many parents and teachers, Madam Speaker, have asked for the re-introduction of exams, particularly, Year 8 and Year 10. As students presently have a shorter span of attention (rotating from one task to another), plagiarism is common, high absenteeism of students trying to complete task by the due date often occur, and also high absenteeism of teachers as many schools have to have Saturday classes to complete syllabus, thus giving teachers very little rest where they themselves have to complete their moderation.

Madam Speaker, because of the high students to teacher ratio (sometimes 50 in a class), there is less time for interaction between a teacher and student, less chalk and talk time, thus students tend to acquire lower proficiency in literacy and numeracy, which means that if something is not done to

reverse this trend, we will have children who cannot read and write, whereas only a few years ago, Fiji had the highest rates of numeracy and literacy in the Pacific.

In addition, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education needs to review the teachers' terms and conditions of employment. At 55 years of age, teachers are at their optimum level of performance and service. Therefore, retiring them at that age makes little sense since other Pacific Island countries are recruiting our retirees, and are themselves benefitting from these services. Also, Madam, Speaker, rural and other location allowances have been pending, so to be fair, please pay them their fair wages, and even raise their salary package to commensurate with their burdening responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, there were three scholarships: the Public Service Commission Scholarship, Multi-Ethnic Affairs Scholarship and FAB or *I Taukei* Affairs Scholarship, that have been combined into the merit-based system of what is popularly called "Toppers" which was introduced in 2010. Since its introduction, the intake into tertiary institutions are disproportionate to the numbers in population.

For the Fiji School of Medicine, University of the South Pacific, Fiji School of Nursing and Teacher Training at the School of Education in Lautoka's Fiji National University and University of Fiji, the way this trend is developing indicates that there will be problems in ensuring that the main communities participate equitably in professions which will determine, in a major way, the running of our country in the professional, technical and intellectual output of graduates from our tertiary institutions.

It is obvious from the figures that the Indo-Fijians are outstripping all the other communities, including the Indigenous Fijians and especially the minorities: the Part-Europeans, Rotumans and people from Rabi and Kioa. This is why, Madam Speaker, merit alone is not and should not be the only criterion for determining access to tertiary studies.

Madam Speaker, looking at Pillar 9 of the People's Charter which states, I quote: "Making Fiji a Knowledge Based Society by ensuring access to quality education for all", emphasises that equity has to be built into the merit-based system as the notion of being fair, just or reasonable, and must not be forgotten or overlooked in any educational policy, otherwise education will lay the basis for division and dissension in the future.

Education, Madam Speaker, must bring us together. Therefore, the equity provision, otherwise known as social justice, plays this vital role. Evidence suggests that most recipients of Government sanctioned scholarship programmes tend to migrate overseas after serving their respective bonds. Consequently, the merit-based system, in its present form, will aggravate the increase in migration trend. Ultimately, Madam Speaker, this will result in continuous shortage and imbalance in the labour market in terms of addressing the human resource needs of the country, in priority sectors of the economy. This defeats the policy intent, and points to the reality behind the merit based system of awarding scholarships.

It is imperative, therefore, Madam Speaker, to note that a total of 5,201 employed skilled personnel migrated overseas in 2006. This consists of 83 per cent who were Indo-Fijians, 12 per cent Indigenous Fijians and five per cent belonged to other races. Similarly in 2007, 81.3 per cent were Indo-Fijians, 13 per cent Indigenous Fijians and 5.7 per cent other races who migrated overseas. This illustrates the point, Madam Speaker, that the overhauling of scholarships, that is, the PSC, Multi-Ethnic Affairs and FAB or *I Taukei* Affairs Scholarships and providing a single merit-based system across the board without harmonizing and taking into consideration all ethnic groups, will hardly cater for the

future needs of our human resources and these concerns must be urgently addressed by the Ministry of Education and other relevant Government Ministries.

Another important factor, Madam Speaker, needing urgent review is the funding criteria for schools where bigger schools, because of their numbers, are the major beneficiaries of the Ministry of Education funding and because of the economy of scale, they can provide for various specialist facilities like libraries, IT facilities and other necessary technical and musical and science facilities. As a consequence, these schools found mostly in the urban areas, attract the best calibre of teachers and students. Even government schools and their boarding facilities have been allowed to deteriorate and without a needs-based funding formula, these boarding schools and the rural maritime schools will not be able to compete.

Madam Speaker, in the 2013 Constitution, it affirms there the right to education, however, I am very concerned that, in spite of the Government's emphasis on free education and its full support, it still intends to close down Laucala Bay Secondary School by the end of 2014. Madam Speaker, repeated requests by the School Board, PTA and Old Scholars not to close the School in 2012, as most of the students come from low to middle income families, fell on deaf ears as Ministry of Education Officials continued with their plans for the closure of the School.

Madam Speaker, the School is now fenced in the middle, and the Sports Council is using one half and the other classrooms are occupied by Forms 5, 6 and 7. Forms 1, 2 and 3 have been relocated to Nasinu Secondary School, and there are plans in the pipeline to move Nasinu Secondary School to another location to make room for a development project.

Madam Speaker, extra costs for students and families in buying new uniforms, adjusting to new schools and new bus routes, which would contribute to an increase in high school dropouts, were hardly considered. The Ministry of Education has compromised the principles of "education for all" by closing down thriving urban schools in place of opening new schools with unknown potentials, costs and threats, which is of great concern.

Madam Speaker, I thank God for His guidance and the people for their support in delivering to us 18 seats on this side of the Chamber, to keep the Government in check, which to my mind, is a good first step and a solid foundation on which we can and will build for the future.

Madam Speaker, I make this solemn pledge to the families of those citizens whose lives were lost in yet unexplained circumstances and who still wait for justice, we will not rest until you do receive justice, for so long as one family in Fiji is denied justice, then justice is denied to all. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Acclamation)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I am deeply honoured to make my maiden speech as a Member of Parliament and as Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. I follow on the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Leader of the Opposition in congratulating you on your appointment as Speaker. I know I have very big shoes to fill because everywhere I go, I become aware of the respect and love in which you are held in the community for your untiring efforts to improve the lives of ordinary people. You have left me with great example of service to our beloved nation, and I pledge before you and the rest of the House today to continue your legacy and build on it as we move forward in our new democracy.

Madam Speaker, I know the challenges facing women, children and families who are disadvantaged because I have lived that experience in my own life. I come from a single parent family in which my mother brought up five children singlehandedly. We were very poor, life was tough and my brothers and sisters and I grew up without many of the things that others had, but we had the love and support of our mother, the best thing that any child can have in this whole world.

Her name is Nazmun Nisha and she is still living in Ba, my hometown. I want to thank her before this Parliament, and before the nation for all that she has done for me, and the rest of our family. My mother always said that getting an education was the way for us to climb out of poverty, so this was instilled in me right from the start. The problem was that, she could not afford the fees to send us to school. We were classic example of what the honourable Prime Minister referred to in his speech as one of the hundreds of thousands of Fijian families, over the years, who want something better for their children but have been trapped in a cycle of poverty. One cannot imagine the anxiety my mother suffered worrying about how her five children would get an education, but by the stroke of luck, help was always at hand. Thanks to Brother Francis and to the rest of the Monfort family, all of my brothers and sisters managed to do well.

A group of teachers at Xavier College in Ba banded together to pay my school fees, and so I was able to attend classes. My other siblings were also assisted similarly. I cannot tell you, Madam Speaker, how deeply we appreciate the generosity and kindness of these wonderful people around us. It was the leg up we desperately needed to get ahead in life. So today, I also want to thank the Monfort Brothers who are administering Xavier College, especially Brother Francis, the current Principal, who taught me, and has a huge influence on my life.

Brother Francis has been a wonderful mentor to me, guiding me with advice and assistance at every stage of my life. I became the Deputy Head Girl of Xavier College, and I am extremely proud that my youngest daughter is currently the Head Girl of the same college, and my eldest daughter is a secondary school teacher. Thanks to Brother Francis and to the rest of the Monfort family, all of my brothers and sisters managed to do well. One of my sisters is a doctor - a private practitioner in Ba, my two brothers are in the medical fields in New Zealand and Australia respectively, and my other sister is well settled. I was inspired to become an educator. I have taught at a number of schools around Ba, including Ba Sanatan College, DAV College, and AD Patel College where I was the Vice Principal, before FijiFirst provided me with the opportunity to enter politics.

Naturally, I share the honourable Prime Minister's view that Government's free schooling policy is in its defining achievement. More than anything else, giving more of our young people access to education, carries the greatest prospect of breaking the cycle of poverty that is holding so many Fijians back, and I am extremely proud to be a living proof of that.

Before I outline what I plan to achieve as Minister, Madam Speaker, I also want to thank my husband and my two daughters for supporting me in my decision to leave teaching and pursue a political career. I am sure every honourable Member in this Chamber will appreciate how much harder our lives would be without the support of our loved ones.

I am deeply honoured to have been given the portfolio of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. I have already done a lot of community work in this area, especially with the HART Housing Project in Ba. In fact, I made a point of specialising in the needs of children, in fact, organised the first Christmas Party those underprivileged children had never experienced. Seeing the delight on their faces is something I will never forget. It reminded me that the richest experiences in life cannot be bought with money. They come through doing something to help others, especially those in need.

In my portfolio, Madam Speaker, I intend to reach out personally to women, children and the disadvantaged. The Government cannot have an uncaring face, it cannot simply be a bureaucracy. We need to constantly get out there, amongst the people, listen sincerely to their needs, show them that we care, come back and work as hard as we can in a targeted sense to change their lives for the better. I am inspired by the example the honourable Prime Minister has set for us in being close to the people himself, and of course, the example you have set in my position, Madam Speaker. I have already begun to continue your tradition of visiting villages, settlements, towns and cities all over Fiji. As Minister, I have been embraced with open arms and without exception, have been overwhelmed by the support of the people.

While I am well known in Ba, I am a stranger in a large part of the country, but have been deeply touched by the welcome I have received. Much, of course, is due to the Government's policies of poverty alleviation which are making such a difference in the lives of ordinary people. Instead of empty promises, we are delivering, but there is still much to be done. There are still too many informal settlements that do not have access to piped water, still too many people outside the Government's Social Welfare safety net, but we have made extraordinary progress in the past years and that effort is intensifying, as the honourable Prime Minister indicated in his own speech this morning.

Madam Speaker, last week in this Chamber, His Excellency the President set out a range of measures that the Government will implement in this session, many of them especially targeted at assisting the disadvantaged. They include:

- 1) assisting those *I Taukei* who are asset rich but cash poor to develop their land, reap the benefits and improve the general standard of living;
- 2) enable Fijians on lower income to benefit from a range of new measures, such as an increase in the minimum wage, and cheaper and better access to electricity, water and medical care;
- 3) extend the free schooling program to accredited pre-schools in the year before primary schools;
- 4) make sure children in Year 1 get adequate nutrition with a glass of milk each day; and
- 5) encourage ordinary Fijians to set up businesses and provide better conditions in our markets.

All these measures which will be outlined in the coming Budget have a direct positive impact on my portfolio, and I look forward very much to be part of the team that implements them.

Madam Speaker, I am proud that this Government does not believe in short term handouts as a way to alleviate poverty. It does not believe in "stop gap" or "quick fix" measures that simply deprive us of the revenue we need to run the country as a whole. Our underlying philosophy is not providing handouts so that people go back to being poor when money runs out, it is about giving leg ups, so that people's lives can be permanently changed for the better. Empowering them not by fostering a culture of dependency, but by giving them the things they need to improve their own lives.

I am especially proud of some of the things that my Ministry has done to improve the lives of ordinary women all over Fiji. Encouraging them to use their own skills and natural resources that are at hand to add value to those resources and generate their own incomes are things that are really making a difference for our women, and of course, benefiting their children.

As I have already indicated, I am extremely proud of our education revolution and the way it is already enriching the lives of Fijian children, and we will continue to do so. As a teacher, I get very excited by the vision of the honourable Prime Minister that he has laid out for our clever country in which children be the best possible chance to not only go to school, but to universities and technical colleges. As someone who came from a disadvantaged background, I know this was the way out of poverty for myself, and the rest of my family.

Madam Speaker, I am extremely proud to be part of this revolution and to be given the opportunity to play a major role in improving the lives of my fellow Fijians, and I intend to play my own part in honouring the honourable Prime Minister's Pledge, that we will leave no one behind in the new Fiji. I pledge before the House today, that I will strive to do my job to the best of my ability.

Thank you all for your support and the kindness that I have received so far. God Bless you All. God Bless our beloved Fiji!

(Acclamation)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, at the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your wonderful achievement in having being elected the Speaker of Parliament. It calls for celebration on the part of all Fijian women, whatever their political allegiance and we all join in wishing you, Madam Speaker, the very best as you assume your high Office.

Like the speakers before me, I am deeply honoured to be assuming the role of a Member of Parliament and as Assistant Minister for Health. I intend to do everything I can to assist the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, as we work to improve the health care of all Fijians.

It is an immense challenge to deliver adequate services in Fiji, just as it is, in most countries and even the advanced democracies. Great strides have been made in the past eight years and we intend to continue our reforms in the months and years ahead. All over the country, more Fijians have gained access to new hospitals, existing hospitals have been renovated and we have built more health care centres and nursing stations, especially in rural areas.

Madam Speaker, I have come to politics relatively late in life yet, I have had the immense privilege of being close to many thousands of ordinary people in my previous role. As many of you know, I have been a radio broadcaster for 24 years; first, at Communications Fiji Limited (CFL) and then, at the Fiji Broadcasting Commission (FBC). For the past 14 years, I have hosted the women's morning programme in Hindi on FBC and later, the *Aina Talkback* programme on radio and television, that became one of the most popular shows in Fiji.

It has given me unique insight into the concerns of the audience, those ordinary Fijian men and women who look up to us in this Chamber to do what we can to improve their lives. They are hardworking, decent people who have placed in us their trust, to serve them and to look after their interests. As His Excellency the President said in his opening Address, "we must not let them down".

I also know, because of my constant interaction with them over the years, that one of their chief concerns is health care. They do not expect a country of our size and resources to provide the same standard of care as our larger neighbours do, but they do expect the Government to provide them with an adequate level of service and that is, the constant challenge before us. We need to be able to meet that challenge, not only by improving facilities over time but staffing the system with doctors and nurses, who have the right qualifications and attitude to patient care.

Most of the complaints I received on radio were not about facilities but were about the attitude of health care staff. Our doctors, nurses and ancillary staff often work in highly charged environments, in an atmosphere of pressure and crises. They must always be sympathetic to the needs of patients and their families, and that is the message I intend to take with me as I visit hospitals and health care centres throughout the country.

There is no room in our system for negligence, rudeness and abuse. Most of our health care professionals are professional and compassionate. They understand that patients and their families are often experiencing a time of great stress, so I urge everyone to follow their example, as we continually strive to build a better system. The right to health is now enshrined in our Constitution and that right must be upheld.

Madam Speaker, several new provisions will be contained in the 2015 Budget next month to improve access to health care, especially by Fijians with low income. They include: providing Fijians who earn less than \$20,000 a year with free medicine; giving Fijians who earn less than \$20,000 a year free treatment at the new Tertiary Hospital to be built in Lautoka; and training and recruiting more doctors so that we have, at least, one doctor to every thousand people in Fiji. Those measures are a sign of our commitment to keep reversing the lack of investment in the system by previous governments, and we want to keep building a culture of excellence, of always putting the patient first.

Madam Speaker, I am also a firm believer that everyone needs to take greater responsibility for their own health. It is extremely worrying that no matter what we do to provide primary health care and tackle communicable diseases, the incidence of non-communicable diseases continue to rise. As we all know, such conditions as hypertension, diabetes and heart disease are largely related to lifestyle.

Many Fijians are taking steps to address the problem by exercising more and eating less. However, we also need to stop smoking altogether and drink less of the two “grog” - alcohol and kava, because it stands to reason that there will be less pressure on the health system, if more Fijians start taking better care of themselves.

Madam Speaker, I come to this Parliament and this portfolio eager to learn, and with a prayer to Almighty God to give me the strength and wisdom to serve the Fijian people to the best of my ability. God has blessed me with a wonderful life.

I was born in Rakiraki and grew up on a sugarcane farm operated by my father, Arjun Shankar, who also worked for the Fiji Sugar Corporation. He is still alive and I want to pay a special tribute to him today and thank him for his loving care over the years. Unfortunately my mother, Daya Wati Shankar, did not live to see this day, but she would have been very proud to know of the great honour bestowed on me by the Fijian people. She and my father instilled in me the values that I hold dear to this day: hard work, sincerity, honesty, integrity and love and compassion for all. I also want to thank my husband, Satish Bhatnagar, for being my pillar of strength over the years and who inspired me to greater things; and my two children, of whom I am very proud of, as well as the rest of my extended family.

I thank the honourable Prime Minister and FijiFirst for the confidence they have placed in me. Of course, I also want to thank those Fijians who put their trust in me by voting for me in the General Elections.

Madam Speaker, it is wonderful to see more women in our Parliament: you as the Speaker, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the President of the National Federation Party (NFP) and the women on my side of the Chamber. We are all role models, especially for young women, and I join

you in hoping that our presence here will encourage many more women to become part of the political process.

May God guide us in our effort to build a better and more prosperous Fiji.

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I will now adjourn Parliament for morning tea and you are all invited, including our friends who are here this morning, to share the refreshments.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.40 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.15 a.m.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members, one of the world's earliest and most recognised philosophers, the great Shakespeare, had once said, I quote: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures."

Madam Speaker, I rise to speak in this august Chamber for the first time and it is a great privilege and honour to be able to do so. I owe that privilege to the people of this great nation, who have entrusted in me their trust to be their voice in this august Parliament. I wish to assure them of my undivided loyalty, to living up to their trust, that I will represent their interests and needs first, before my own.

I aspire to live up to the expectations of our people and make meaningful contributions in this Parliament. I also aspire to maintain, if not improve, the high standards set by my predecessors, all who have walked along the corridors of Parliament since Fiji gained Independence are leaders of great vision.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, it would be remiss of me to go on any further without first congratulating you on your ascension as Fiji's first female Speaker of Parliament. In fact, you are the first female to hold such a position in the South Pacific. I join those who have already spoken before me, and the many others who will after me, to tell you that this is indeed a great day for all women in this part of the Region. It signifies the recognition that women can equally be leaders in our society, and that there can no longer be any excuse to tolerate inequality of gender. On that note Madam, well done and all the best for the next four years.

I wish, at this point, to pay tribute to a number of people. Firstly, my campaign team in Macuata. I was blessed to share a common vision with a team of great men and women who like me, believed in a greater calling for Fiji; a nation that recognises Fiji is at a crossroad; a calling to determine the direction to travel to ensure we each a desirable destination for our young nation. First to my campaign team, party agents, financial members, supporters, family and friends, thank you for the common purpose and endless days and nights spent together under the hot sun and in the still of the night. For days, speaking our thoughts and aspirations for the interests of our people and the many others, and with the blessing of God decided that I was believable enough to be their representative in this august Parliament.

My special thanks to the *vanua* of Caumatalevu; the *vanua* of Cakaunitabua; the *vanua* of Lalagavesi and the *Turaga Bale Na Tui Cakau*, for his outstanding leadership that has held Vanua Levu together.

Madam Speaker, I am also grateful to my colleagues and mentors at the Vitivou Forum. who have since 2012 recognised my talents and have encouraged and guided me along my journey. To all of you, my warmest *vinaka vakalevu*.

You do not get to this place without stalwart support from many quarters, but there is one source of support more important than any other - your family. My wife, Rasala, who has been a bedrock of my life for nearly ten years. I thank God for her life and the inspiration she has provided to me at all times. I also acknowledge our children, whom I look at daily and remind myself as to why I must fight; to ensure that they have a better future and one where they will have an equal opportunity at the

starting line; a future that is void of racial intolerance and minuet political bickering; a future in which indigenous Fijian aspirations are acknowledged, nurtured and supported; a future in which the business skills and the prowess of Fijians of other ethnicities now a part of our great nation are learned, and passed on to all our communities for the benefit of a shared learning and adoption.

Madam Speaker, in 1951, a baby girl was born. She was the fourth and the youngest child of Ratu Tevita Ranuinui and Anasimeci Ramunua of Wasavulu, Labasa. The baby girl was born into a family of provincial administrators, with her father being the *Turaga Buli* Labasa at the time, and she grew up with the strict disciplines of the colonial era. She was much loved and taught the disciplines of life, of being a good Christian. She was taught to be a lady and a good mother. The baby girl was Elina Ranuinui. Elina later became a school teacher, a good seamstress, she was the best cook in my mind, and a well acknowledged Sunday school teacher. She was an unparalleled role model and motivator. She was my mother and she passed away just four months ago.

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge and pay tribute to her today. She is the reason why I am here. Her privileged and chiefly upbringing never influenced her to be anything less, other than a humble, practical woman, who ensured that her only child in her later years was taught all she herself was taught. For that, I will forever be indebted and humbled. It was her that brought me onto this path. Even whilst dressing me as a young boy for Sunday school in my best white, she would tell me that one day, I will be a political leader.

Since those early days, I have been fascinated by politics. Tragic but true, I have dreamt of standing in this very place and pleading the interests of our people many times. At 32 years of age, I am here and I look forward to your guidance and that of the honourable Members, to be a representative, deserving of our people.

Madam Speaker, there comes a time in the history of nations when their people must become fully reconciled with their past, if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Fiji, has reached such a time. That is why Parliament is assembled here today, to deal with a new democratic process of taking Fiji forward.

Fijians are a passionate and practical lot. For us, symbolism is important but unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong. It is not sentiments that makes history but our actions.

I humbly stand here today, firstly, to offer an apology to the honourable Prime Minister and to the Interim Government for my own role in Fiji's political history. I had and still have strong political aspirations, especially for the things that an *iTaukei* and a freedom fighter like me holds so dear. Though my political dreams were clear, like any other human being, I am also vulnerable to error of judgment, and I know that I cannot undo some things I have already done. However, I can atone for some of it by seeking forgiveness and moving forward.

It is my hope, therefore, to be acknowledged as equally useful as all other honourable Members without stain or prejudice, based on the principle of interpretation as stipulated in Section 3(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, which promotes the spirit of human dignity, equality and freedom. I am here, Madam Speaker, to appeal to this Parliament to reach out to each other and heal our past wounds. Learn from it and help build a better future for all our children.

I fondly remember today that there are times when in our human frail bodies, we feel there is no other reason to go on. The human spirit offers you restitution in the form of the briefest of smiles. I take an example here of one of the darkest periods in my life. As I languished in my prison cell, and

when it seemed like my conviction was pushed to the limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards. Perhaps, just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going.

It is this human affection, whether intended or not, that I ask that we exercise without boundaries in this august Parliament. If Fiji is to progress and for us to be long remembered as the 50 Members of Parliament who really united Fiji, we must break all barriers and embrace each other's differences. After all, we are here in Fiji to stay. Just as the quote goes, "A man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished." I plead to each one of us to reach across the racial, cultural and religious barriers and make this work. I am inspired to say, "Yes we can and yes, we will."

Madam Speaker, I appeal to our honourable Prime Minister, in particular this afternoon, to help us all move forward. I appeal, on behalf of all political prisoners, to reconcile our differences, embrace our shared humanity and moments of vulnerabilities and forgive each other. Saint Paul said, I quote: "conscience I say, why is mine judge by another." I have, no doubt in my mind, that many who have now lived behind bars for a large part of their lives have discovered the Kingdom of God and have renewed their spiritual minds. They seek an opportunity to move on with their lives, end a life of an outlaw and reunite with their families.

Madam Speaker, I plead with the honourable Prime Minister today to end the pain and sorrow silently suffered by families, individuals and communities by creating a policy for national reconciliation. It does not have to be immediate, but the work towards the reality can start now.

The words of the late Nelson Mandela is so true when he stated, I quote: "A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred. He is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free, if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken away from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity." Madam Speaker, freedom is indivisible. The chains on any Fijian were the chains on all of them. The chains on all Fijians were the chains on one.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to draw our attention to the economic and social development of our nation. Our challenge for the future is to embrace a new partnership between the indigenous and non-Indigenous Fijians. The core of this partnership, for the future, is the closing of the gap between races on economic achievement, business success, educational achievement and employment opportunities.

It is no coincidence that we have broken down social barriers, at the same time as we have economic ones. For example, in the last 40 years, the role of women in the workplace has grown enormously, as signified by your appointment, Madam Speaker, likewise, the leading of the battalion march at Friday's Fiji Day military parade by a number of women. Fiji has also become much more ethnically diverse.

We have a vibrant multi-cultural, a multi-religious community and significant population from India, China, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, amongst other nations. When it comes to economic issues, my instinct is for open markets, free competition and as little State interference as possible, and when it comes to social issues, I start with the same preference. I am a believer in the rights of the individual and I am suspicious of the State seeking to exercise control over personal choices. Of course, it is not always easy to brand an issue as social or as economic, and it is hard to get good social outcomes unless you have the money to spend on them.

This brings me to address His Excellency the President's statements in opening this session of Parliament. In His Address, His Excellency outlined the many plans Government intends to implement

for our people, come 2015. I applaud the plans that will see \$10 million, for example, directed towards assisting indigenous Fijians improve their land. May I add, Madam Speaker, that this was a common manifesto item with SODELPA, and the other political parties had offerings on land matters as well. This is an area we all recognise that needs our concerted support and co-operation. However, without restraint, Madam Speaker, I ask that as policy makers, we devise ways to ensure that the funding truly benefits the people it is intended for. The shape and form in which this assistance will reach our people, I hope will be properly thought out. The way forward is land innovation and productivity.

In my own personal experience, administering the land leases of our people in the *Tikina* of Labasa has been a challenge, especially with the recognised fact that indigenous Fijians are often asset rich but cash strapped, thus the capital needed to allow us to develop subdivisions or to implement commercial farming has almost always been non-existent. The funding provided, thus by Government, often just reaches the implementation phase of infrastructural requirements. These have so often required developers to become a necessary part of the development and further, under the current iTaukei Land Trust Board Act, thisacerbates the challenge. The developer owns the lease because of his capital and the landowner is confined to just receiving lease money twice a year. A framework must be adopted to enable financial literacy training, skilled training and embody the right style of leadership to steadily move towards indigenous enterprise contribution through industry outputs to be reflected in GDP proportionate to the composition of their indigenous population.

I am compelled, at this stage, to ask that Government considers reviewing policies on business ownerships as well in towns and cities. At present, lucrative businesses are mostly in the hands of Fijians that are not indigenous. Can we please remove the clique that exists in our urban economic spinoff areas and truly encourage indigenous Fijian participation in business?

I also hold fears that business tycoons from beyond our shores will make huge investments in Fiji and in the process, are allowed to control key aspects of commercial operations in this country which, hopefully, will not extend to some other form of political control. As a businessman, it is frustrating to be victims of elite tycoon politics, and it would be a sad day for this country if international investors take some commercial and political control of this country.

His Excellency has outlined the intent of Government, to provide the basic needs of water and electricity to the most needy members of our society free of charge and with reduced cost. Government also wants to support the education of our children, our most important assets for our future. Free tuition beginning from kindergarten is similar to the aspiration of the SODELPA Party, and it recognises the importance of laying a solid foundation for the formative years of our children's education.

Short of criticising all this giveaways for our people that many claimed were vote buying tactics, I will choose to believe that the Government has genuine intent to level the playing field for all communities in Fiji, so I will restrain my comments at this stage to a conservative caution on national spending and affordability. I am motivated to help make Fiji a fairer, stronger, more prosperous, secure and inclusive nation, as well as to be a voice for rational policymaking, which recognises some basic realities to remove the mentality of slavery caused by colonisation's indirect rule system that affects third world countries.

Madam Speaker, I would like to mention some specific policy areas in which I will be closely monitoring. Relevant to my interest, I will highlight issues that affect our public enterprises, trade and commerce. I intend to promote liberalisation of trade by influencing the Government of the day to give back power to the people.

Madam Speaker, the Government's expenditure is well above our national revenue. I suspect that Government has no choice but to negotiate the sale of some of its assets. We only sell assets when they are not making any profit. My focus will be on the threshold to be met, whereby public enterprises, trade and commerce provide the harmony for Government to have the ability to repay debt and cut taxes in one end, and on the other allow wealth generated from private sector revenues to pay for social services.

My second area of focus is commercialising innovation, that is, moving smart ideas from the laboratory to the marketplace. This means closer ties between research institutions and industry. It means choosing key areas of research where we can build real scale, and leverage into a national competitive advantage.

My third area of focus is making Government more efficient and productive. That includes more use of contestability and contracting out in choosing the providers of services. It means better use of information technology. In the private sector, there is a huge focus on giving customers a simple one click approach in order to complete a transaction. Where is the one-click mentality in Government?

Let us get serious about evidence-based policy using randomised trials to test whether specific programmes actually work. Let us look at using the price signal more extensively to best allocate scarce resources. I think we need less intrusive regulation which uses the power of incentive to secure outcomes.

Madam Speaker, the prayer of this august House seeks blessings of God on the nation. God's formula is simple, "...where there is unity, God commands his blessing..."

With those words, I wish this august House well in its deliberations. May God bless our people and may God bless the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

(Acclamation)

HON. COMMANDER J.R. CAWAKI.—I have the greatest honour to present my maiden speech after having being elected to this Parliament and being appointed as the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Rural Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

First of all, I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker. I join previous speakers in paying tribute to the precedent you have set by becoming the first female Speaker of a Fijian Parliament and a Pacific Island Parliament. It is a tribute to both your personal qualities and the great work you have done as Minister for Women and Poverty Alleviation, in raising the living standards of our Fijian people. Fijians everywhere wish you the very best in your new role, and I assure you my deepest respect and desire to assist you in the performance of your duties.

Madam Speaker, I had the pleasure in hearing the honourable Prime Minister's maiden speech, especially his accountable events of 2006 and his appreciation of the role of the Military in holding the nation together. I have had the privilege to be one of those around him, and I deeply appreciate the sentiments he expressed about the values we were pursuing on behalf of our beloved country.

It is true that we were patriots, we cared deeply about our nation and the absolute need to keep us united. We did not seek power for power's sake. We always intended to sustain civilian rule for only as long as genuine democracy could be introduced. It is a matter of deep personal satisfaction that we have achieved our objectives.

Like the honourable Prime Minister, I have decided to leave the Military to pursue a political career as required by the Constitution. As he has told us in his speech this morning, it was a wrench but I also do not have regrets. Indeed, I look forward to working with this democratically elected Parliament and to be fully accountable to the people who sent me here, to improve their lives and also to take Fiji forward.

Madam Speaker, I believe that the basis of our winning the Elections rested on the trust that we had built with the Fijian people over the past eight years, that is, to always put their interest first. We, in the Military, have a candid "can do" attitude that came to the fore when ordinary Fijians needed our services, especially in times of national disasters. Some of my most challenging times as Commissioner Western were dealing with the floods in the West and *Cyclone Evan*, but they were also the most rewarding. Working together, we quickly identified areas of need, and we got the relief that was needed, to the people who needed it most.

Our reputation was forged serving the people of Fiji and I want to pay tribute today to the men and women around me in the Western Division during that time, who worked so effectively to assist our people in their time of need. We knew what had to be done to prepare for Cyclone Evans, so it was wonderfully satisfying that given the strength of its destructive winds, we were able to spare Fiji from the loss of lives and injury that struck our neighbourhoods.

When the storm passed, we were able to co-ordinate one of the most effective responses to any crisis in Fijian history. Once again, the RFMF came to the rescue. Dozens of homes, schools, health centres and wharves were rebuilt in record time. We got Fiji back on its feet and I will never forget the sense of camaraderie we all felt for a job well done.

I very much enjoyed my work as Commissioner Western and I want to thank the people in the Western Division for the great support they gave me during my term from August 2009 to August 2014. Much of my political support in the General Elections came from the West, so I owe them a special vote of thanks. It was a great privilege to serve you as Commissioner, and it is a great privilege to serve you and everyone else in Fiji in the new Parliament.

Of course, I also want to thank my family for always being there for me. Like the honourable Prime Minister, I take great strength and comfort from my wife, Merekula, my son Junior at QVS, and my extended family, and I thank them for their love and support. Like every honourable Member in this Chamber, I could not take a role in public life without that support.

I also want to thank those who supported me during the election campaign - the staff of Fiji First Office in Navua for the campaign that we did for the Serua and Namosi Province; the staff of Fiji First Office in Rakiraki for the campaign that we did in the Ra Province, and the staff of the Fiji First Office in Tavua and Ba for the campaign that we did in Tavua and Ba areas.

Madam Speaker, my first objective as Assistant Minister for Agriculture is to work with all the Ministry of Agriculture staff and stakeholders, to tackle one of our most important problem. This is the high level of our food imports in Fiji, compared to our food exports. With the amount of fertile land we have, Fiji should be a major food exporter, yet we have failed to capitalise on the opportunities we have had, even with our domestic markets. Only now, we are starting to grow some of the produce that we have been importing at high cost. We need to be more attuned to our local markets and the demand for foodstuff in the tourism industry, in particular. We need more farmers producing more food, and that is why the Government is trying to turn more of our young people for farming careers. We should be able to feed ourselves to guarantee our food security, and we should be able to produce enough to be a food exporter, not an importer.

I am especially encouraged by our plans outlined the FijiFirst Manifesto, to provide the *I Taukei* with the means to develop their land and reap the benefits. For so long, the *I Taukei* have enjoyed ownership of a great asset but have not had the means to develop it. With this initiative, we hope to empower the *I Taukei* landowners to consider a wide range of development ideas. Certainly, we need to free up more land for development, rather than having them lying idle. It is a key to a more prosperous future for the *I Taukei* and greater wealth for the economy in general.

Madam Speaker, my objective for Rural and Maritime Development is to reverse the current trend in which rural and maritime people feel they have to move into urban and peri-urban areas in search of employment and the facilities other Fijians take for granted, such as education and health. One of the great advantages of the Bainimarama Government has been to give people in other parts of Fiji the same level of services enjoyed by those living in Viti Levu, such things as schools, health centres, access to government services, access to telecommunications and the internet. We aim to step up that development in our next term to improve the circumstances of people living where they are rather than obligating them to move.

We need to create more jobs in rural areas and we will. We need to improve access to education and health, and we are. We are delivering such things as electricity and clean water that many isolated places in Fiji have never experienced. The Government has also put a huge amount of effort into improving transportation links with inter-island vessels, so Fijians are less isolated and we can move larger equipment to our outer islands quickly and more efficiently. I will also ensure the strengthening and the authority of Divisional Commissioners under the Integrated Rural Development Framework to drive rural and maritime development at divisional and district levels.

Madam Speaker, my third objective for National Disaster Management is to improve our ability to cope with such events which will always be with us but which we have already shown we can deal with more effectively. We need to develop and cultivate a better culture for risk management. We need to continually refine our systems to deal effectively with cyclones, tsunamis and earthquakes when they strike, and also to minimise the impacts on our people. So that is also one of my priorities over the next four years.

Madam Speaker, I would like to conclude with an appeal to the *I Taukei* landowners to adopt a more flexible approach to land usage, not only to benefit themselves but the wider economy. We have enough land in Fiji to substantially increase the cultivation of our crops for our domestic and export needs but we have failed to appreciate the commercial benefits of doing so. I say to all landowners; "Now is the time to either utilise your land yourself or make it available for others to use it. You owe it to yourselves and you owe it to our economy. You owe it to us all to help move Fiji forward".

Madam Speaker, these are great days for the Fijian people but we need to seize the opportunities that have been provided by Government and run with them. I am especially keen on our young people to take the advantage of our free schooling incentives. There is now no reason for any Fijian parents not to send their child to school. Now, there is also no reason why that child cannot go to higher education if he or she has the capability.

We have heard a lot of drop-outs or *vuli vakavo* in our Taukei society in particular. Let us put those days behind us and embrace the education revolution that this Government is offering every Fijian young person because that is the key to a better Fiji for the *I Taukei*, as well as every Fijian, and the best way to take our nation forward.

Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu*.

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you will kindly note that we are ahead in time based on our Batting Order, but we will keep the honourable Members who have been allocated time to present their statements today, which means that we may adjourn earlier as scheduled.

HON. I. DELANA.- Madam Speaker, it is a great honour to make my maiden speech in Parliament after winning a seat in the recent Elections, and being appointed as Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports.

Firstly, I would like to join the other speakers in congratulating you on being elected as Speaker. You have been a great role model for all women in Fiji, and I believe you will continue to inspire everyone in the high Office you now hold.

Madam Speaker, I am very honoured and humbled to be taking my place at the age of 29, in this great Parliament among so many people who are older and more experienced than I. Over the past few weeks and months, I sometimes felt that I was in a dream being invited to stand for Parliament, taking part in the Elections campaign and being part of the FijiFirst team that the Fijian people have chosen to take our nation forward.

I am deeply indebted to many people who have placed their confidence in me. I would especially like to thank the honourable Prime Minister and head of FijiFirst for encouraging me to enter politics. I intend, over the next four years, to work as hard as I can, to prove myself worthy of the trust that has been placed upon me.

Madam Speaker, many Fijians know my life story but I will repeat some of the details for those who do not. I lost my left leg in a bus accident at the age of three. It was obviously a terrible blow for me and my loved ones, but I decided as I grew up that being disabled would not hold me back. If anything, I became more determined to prove myself.

Like many Fijians who are disadvantaged, I turned to sports. As time went by, I found out that even with one leg, I could be a good athlete. I specialise in high jump and that was when my sporting career took off. I competed at the Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled in 2006, won a silver medal at the IPC Athletics World Championship in Christchurch in 2011, and then a gold medal at the 2012 Summer Paralympics in London.

I will never forget how proud I was to compete for Fiji in the Paralympics, where I became the first Fijian to win an Olympic medal. I wrapped myself in the flag after I cleared the bar and I could hear the cheers of the crowd for Fiji. I never dreamt that my win would mean so much for the people back home. The day I arrived back in Fiji was a day that I will never forget. The large crowds cheering me on were very humbling for a boy from Nadrala, Nadroga. While I felt that I did not deserve so much attention, I was very touched. Today, I want to thank everyone again for the support they gave me, and especially the Government for the house it built for me.

I did what I did at the Games for myself, but it was wonderful to realise that it meant so much to others, and especially those Fijians who are disabled. Everywhere I go in Fiji, I said the same thing, "No matter what disability someone might have, it is no barrier to living a satisfying and meaningful life".

I like to think that in all my public appearances and especially at schools, I leave people thinking, "Well, if he can win a gold medal for high jump with one leg, anything is possible". I know, because

people tell me that I have broken down some of the barriers of understanding about disabled people, and I am proud of that.

When you win an Olympic gold medal in your 20s, many people think, "What on earth can I do to top that up?" I was the same. What do I do for the rest of my life? Well, here I am in the Fijian Parliament as an elected representative of the people and Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports. I have to admit that I can hardly believe it myself, but it is a challenge that with the help of those around me, I intend to meet. I will certainly tackle the task before me with the same determination I had when I leapt over that bar in London.

For me, it is a dream job, to work for the betterment of young Fijians doing what I love most and that is, being involved with sports. We have great plans in the Ministry to continue the work of the past eight years to improve sporting facilities throughout Fiji. They are already at a standard that people only dreamt about a few years ago, but there is still much to be done, and the work to inspire young people to develop better bodies and better minds never ends. I intend to travel to as many places as possible in Fiji over the next four years encouraging our young people to achieve their personal best. I want to inspire them with the idea that no matter how many challenges they face in life, then can succeed, like me, with determination and hard work.

There are so many people I want to thank for helping me along the way: my mother, Lice Bulasui; my aunt, Asenaca Robinson; my former school teachers who had taught me from primary to tertiary; my coach, Freddy Fatiaki, and all those who have supported me in any way through word or deed, and I cannot mention you all by name but because of you, I am here today. On my darkest days, you were there when I needed you. On my best days, you were there to encourage and support me, so because of you, I was able to overcome and support myself. Because of you, I was able to overcome my disability and reach the greatest heights and because of you all, I have been taught the values by which I now lead my life. *Vinaka vakalevu* to you all for your assistance, love and your confidence in me.

I especially thank those who voted for me in the General Elections and sent me here to represent the interests of all Fijians, and the leaders of FijiFirst, who have played their trust in me as I begin another chapter of my life. I want to use this opportunity to dedicate the rest of my life to serving my country in whatever way I can. Fiji has given me so much and now, I intend to give back what I can or try to even the score.

I urge the young people of Fiji to heed the call of His Excellency the President and the honourable Prime Minister to be patriotic, to love our country and love each other and sing the national anthem with pride. We are blessed with a wonderful nation with wonderful people, so let us all join hands to build a better Fiji to fulfil our dreams.

Madam Speaker, it is a wonderful privilege for me to sit in this Chamber and to be part of our new democracy. To anyone watching, it is obvious that I have a disability but it has never held me back. With God's help, I intend to do great things as a Member of Parliament for myself and my beloved country, so whenever you see me, do not feel sorry for me because right now, I am the luckiest person in the world. *Vinaka vakalevu*, thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Madam Speaker, please allow me to begin by apologising to you and all of the honourable Members of this Chamber, for arriving a little late this morning. I meant no disrespect to anyone, I apologize.

Madam Speaker, I wish to join the other honourable Members in congratulating you warmly on your appointment. Your qualifications and work experience in the Civil Service and in the Region is well known, but I warmly recall other ties as well, especially your tenure as a senior and supervisor to my mother, who was a junior at Adi Cakobau School. Congratulations, Madam!

I am indeed honoured and privileged to have been elected directly and indirectly by many other citizens of Fiji and through value action, to be here today to speak on the Address of the Head of State, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, when he opened Parliament last week. As this is my maiden speech, I shall stick to the English parliamentary conventions with regard to maiden speeches. The keywords for those include: moderation and that they are relatively uncontroversial, often consisting of general statement of the politicians' beliefs and background rather than a partisan comment on a current topic. I shall do my best, Madam Speaker, and leave the fireworks for later.

Speaking on His Excellency's Address at this time would suit the speech description well. Also, Madam Speaker, maiden speeches begin with personal thank yous. On that note, I wish to thank all those who voted for me and the Party I represent. All of their votes earned these seats; they are theirs and they belong to other citizens as well.

I take this opportunity to also thank the leader, the executives, members and supporters of the National Federation Party (NFP) for giving me the great honour of being president. Thank you.

I thank my siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandaunts and granduncles, nieces, nephews and godchildren, who were quite busy promoting my candidature to their friends in their schools, swim clubs, and the like. I thank my relatives in Noikoro, in Beqa, Nakorosau in Moala and other parts of Fiji. I also thank my dear long suffering friends, they all know who they are; one or two may be here today. They are very private people, high achievers in their own right and I know they would prefer not to be lowered by association with me here. Thank you all very much.

I wish to make special mention of my little brother for his efforts in keeping me in check for many years, and ensured that I got some votes in the last Election. Ratu Qoro or Tuks as I would call him, thank you.

Moving forward to His Excellency's Address, it sounded very good, Madam Speaker, and it said all of the right things about moving forward and ending the *coup* culture. Two great things that I hope I can make a positive contribution to, in this term of Parliament but as we all know, Madam Speaker, words without action are empty things that produce nothing. I am very interested that His Excellency's Address produces great positive things for Fiji, and so I shall make some suggestions as to how that may occur.

Madam Speaker, we cannot move forward by doing the same old things and worse, bringing those same old things to a worse degree. After the *coup* of 1987 and 2000, significant portions of our country's population felt alienated and ostracised in their land of birth and to which they, and their forbearers, have made significant contributions. I was made aware of this and was very sensitive to it from a very young age because my late stepfather, Dr. Timoci Bavadra, and my late mother, Adi Kuini Teimumu Vuikaba Speed, led those political parties. They fought very hard to stop those acts of alienation and ostracism. Citizens felt alienated and ostracised, like they do not belong and that their values and roots were made to feel inferior, something to be hidden away for the sake of avoiding unwanted attention.

I truly believe, Madam Speaker, that those who agreed with the cause and all actions taken in 1987 and 2000, would not have understood the depth of the deprivation of their fellow citizens. Why

am I so sure, Madam Speaker? Although, my late stepfather and mother were also leaders and non-racial politicians, they were nevertheless children and grandchildren of some of the oldest and most conservative families in this country, having roots in many chiefly houses around Fiji. Those roots were in our homes, and we heard them daily. We know that their apprehensions, fears and views, motivated them and what they wanted to guard against.

We also know that they were your typical hospitable Fijians, after all, hospitality is the preserve of chiefs, first and foremost. And I know from that experience, Madam Speaker, that not very many, if any of those, who supported the cause and all the actions in 1987 and 2000, knew of the depth of hurt and depravation that they supported. However, it was also obvious that they were certainly cocooned by their political views and beliefs into believing that everything was just fun, and there was no need to discuss and/or reform those things.

I, again, Madam Speaker, know that those who have experienced the feeling of hurt and depravation from 1987 and 2000, felt it very deeply. It would have hurt them to their very core. Very few strong and unique people can ignore all that and come out of those experiences unfazed in their commitment to the greater good, very few indeed, Madam Speaker. Very many can be that hurt for a very long time, if not, forever. We are all human beings, those are human emotions. Some may get over them once they feel that justice has been served. Others may carry it for life, no matter what reparation is made.

This is very irrelevant, Madam Speaker, where we now find ourselves again at the crossroads. After the last *coup*, its impact is best assessed by the favourite term of His Excellency's Government describing it as a "revolution". I, therefore, urge His Excellency's Government to take care that it does not continue to alienate and ostracise another significant portion of the population because the end results in this country have been military *coups*.

I invite His Excellency's Government to look deeper into the maze, to see that from their own analysis, about 60 per cent of the Fijian race did not vote for them. His Excellency's Government should take care and not further alienate and ostracise that number, and if they start doing the right things to that proportion of the population, they may even win their votes over time. That would mean that I, and the others, may lose those votes, but that is fine, if the greater good is ultimately served. Into the details, Madam Speaker, the first question then is; what acts of the revolution by His Excellency's Government are contributing to this process of alienation and ostracism and how can that process be halted for the greater good?

On the issue of Native land, Madam Speaker, many Fijians now know that the entrenched constitutional provisions in the 1997 Constitution with regard to Native land does not exist in the 2013 Constitution. No one needs a degree in constitutional law to work that out, one only needs to read Chapter 13 – the Group Rights of the 1997 Constitution, again Sections 27 and 28 of the 2013 Constitution, to see the marked difference. This factor causes feelings of apprehension, fear, alienation and ostracism amongst many indigenous Fijians. They believe that this land is the source of our identity as Fijians, separate and afar from all the beautiful people and races from different lands who have their own unique and rich cultures rooted in other lands. In moving entrenched constitutional provisions with regards to Native land is thus, alienating and ostracising them. For the first time, Native land is subjected to the State's powers of compulsory acquisition. Previously, this power in this country could only be exercised over rent that was not Native land, as all laws affecting Native land had to pass the requirements of the entrenched constitutional provisions, which is no longer the case.

On the issue of Fijian administration, the removal of a symbolic institution like the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*, is an alienating and ostracising act. Yes, I am one of those who thought that it could be

improved, as nothing in this world is perfect, but to promote peace, harmony and a greater good, especially with the 60 per cent I have referred to – dialogue, consultation, compromising and agreement to reform, would had been better, Madam Speaker.

On the issue of the Fijian name, again, this name was used for the indigenous race for a very, very many years. Our community perceived it rightly or wrongly, as part of our identity as a race, not as a citizen. His Excellency's Government could have spent very little time and resources, to show sensitivity on this issue, and take all of us together to the promised new Fiji under a common name. There was no need to display arrogance and insensitivity again, it did not help.

There are other factors, Madam Speaker, which alienate other members of our country like the appearance of disrespect to their leaders in this Chambers and elsewhere. I therefore urge His Excellency's Government to be "big people" – have big minds and big hearts. I urge them to be magnanimous in their electoral victory, show due respect and decorum to all Members of this Chamber, whether they are in your Party or not, extend the same to those who voted for them. Please, do not be punitive – show courage and leadership, to achieve what you have said you desired to achieve.

This brings me, Madam Speaker, to the issue of broad political dialogue and agreement. Our former leader, the honourable and learned Justice Jai Ram Reddy, and the former Prime Minister, Mr. Rabuka, who began this *coup* culture in our country, in 1997 managed to achieve great political statement of our time – the 1997 Constitution. I have hopes that it can be done again, that is why I am here. If I have no hope, I would not have participated in the General Elections.

On that note, I urge the leaders of this Parliament to take up the challenge, and take the whole country with them to ensure that we understand the past very well, reconcile our own misunderstandings and differences, and move forward, agreeing to disagree on political topic or issues but be in mutual agreement on the fundamentals.

On this note, I wish to pay personal tribute to my late father, Colonel Savenaca Draunidalo. He would like to have left me with a political advice that he voiced once to me, "All of the flowery principles that your dear mother espouses will come to naught if you do not know the art of war". That advice, accords with what his wise uncle also advised me once, "Caution my dear, it is better to be the king maker, than to be the king".

I know, Madam Speaker, that my father met quite a few kings and queens in his time, past and present. I understand that, and I am happy to play my part to help in any way possible, for the words of His Excellency to bear fruit for all over Fiji.

*Vinaka vakalevu!* God Bless Fiji!

(Acclamation)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I rise before you this morning to deliver my inaugural speech. I would like to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address delivered in Parliament on Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2014. It was indeed a momentous occasion when democracy was re-established with the Opening of Parliament after an absence of eight years.

I would also like to take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to congratulate you on your appointment, and for being the first female Speaker of the Parliament in Fiji. It is a historical occasion,

and I am sure that the people of your tiny and far away island of Ono-i-Lau are proud of your achievement.

I also congratulate the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and my fellow Members of Parliament for their respective appointments and hope that together, we will work in tangent and steer our beloved country, Fiji, into new horizons that will benefit all the citizens, irrespective of colour, religion and ethnicity. We should put aside our differences and provide a platform that will provide policies which are conducive to infrastructural and human resource development. We, the honourable Members of the Opposition, will ensure that all Bills introduced in this House are thoroughly scrutinised before they are accented and become law.

I wish to echo an informal comment by the late Mrs. Irene Jai Narayan during the Alliance Party era, when she commented that the reason for the success of the Alliance Party in the early 1970s was not due to the quality of leadership of the late honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, but mainly to the strong opposition provided by members of the Opposition Party led by honourable Siddiq Koya. Although we are outnumbered and disadvantaged, we will provide a strong opposition. We are comforted to know that God always uses less and small people to advance his glory.

Madam Speaker, it is again a great feeling to have the freedom and liberty to speak my mind and express my feelings after eight long years of oppression and controlled freedom of speech. It would have been appropriate to deliver this speech in my indigenous language, to reach out to my voters in the rural areas who do not have a good command of the English language. This would have been possible in the previous Parliament, however, it is not to be so now as we are only allowed to speak in English. Madam Speaker, this is probably the only Parliament in the world where you are not allowed to speak in your mother tongue. In Parliaments in India, China, Korea and Japan, to name a few, Parliamentarians speak in their own languages and yet, they have become developed countries. So much about modernizing Fiji!

Madam Speaker, I find it difficult to apprehend the objective of this policy. I find this as an insult to the indigenous people of this country. It is a clear indication that this Government is conveniently putting in place policies that are slowly and systematically weakening and dismantling institutions and values which are dear to the indigenous people of Fiji. The message it is portraying to aspiring young indigenous politicians is that, if you want to be in Parliament, you just have to understand and speak English. It will kill their enthusiasm and desire to learn and understand the importance of knowing their own language. This may be insignificant now, but will definitely have a long term impact in the future in the lives of indigenous Fijians.

For me personally, the journey to this House was not easy. I had to resign from my work in 2006 to stand for Elections under the banner of a political party. When things did not work out well, I had to stand as an independent candidate.

Madam Speaker, for the General Elections, I was fortunate to have been accepted by the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) as a candidate. I joined the Party because I believed in the ideals and principles it stood for. I thank the party management, staff, volunteer workers and supporters for their encouragement and support throughout the General Elections campaign period.

My special thanks to my campaign manager, Mr. Sanaila Rasotale, for his support, encouragement and guidance through the campaign period. We worked together in the 2006 General Elections where we gained a lot of valuable lessons which helped me to win a seat this time around. I also thank my polling agents and committee for their honest support and dedication.

Madam Speaker, I also want to take this opportunity to thank the *Vanua* of Tailevu North for their support and encouragement: *Na Gone Turaga Bale na Ratu mai Verata; Turaga na Ratu Waimaro; Turaga na Tui Vugalei; Gone Turaga na Roko Tui Tai; Turaga na Taukei Nawainovo; Turaga na Ratu mai Sawakasa; Turaga na Ratu mai Dawasamu; Turaga Tui Wailevu; Turaga Sau, Nasautoka; Turaga na Roko Tui Bau, Nayavu; Vunivalu, Nailega and Tui Naloto.* Without their support, I would not be here today.

Madam Speaker, Tailevu is a very interesting place and full of surprises, especially Tailevu North. This is the centre of the dairy industry in the country. We have the biggest number of milking cows, compared to any other part of Fiji but the milk is Rewa milk.

Madam Speaker, allow me to highlight some of the pressing issues that were raised by the voters from Tailevu North during my campaign. There is a need to construct a roading network to open up the virgin lands and realise the enormous agricultural potentials in this part of the country. If the appropriate authorities take interest and look at the following proposals objectively, the outcome would be the provision of import substitutions for agricultural products.

Madam Speaker, the feeder road from Nameka Village off Nukurua Road to Vatukarasa Village needs to be upgraded. This feeder road has opened up land in the area for commercial root-crop cultivation. Farmers have to abandon their farms because of the condition of the road. During the rainy season, it is inaccessible to vehicles, so they could not transport their farm produce to the market. They have no alternative but to resort to cultivating on the banks of the Rewa River, even with the high risk of flooding.

Vatukarasa Village can be accessed by the Lomaivuna Road to Natavea Village, thence by boat across the Rewa River. If the river is flooded, the alternative access is the Nukurua Road off the Kings Road at Vugalei.

Madam Speaker, there is also a need to construct a link road from Vatukarasa to Tonia Village. This will further open up more farm land and provide easy access for the people in the area to the Kings Road. This will definitely save a lot of travelling time and cost, should they want to travel to Wainibuka or to the Western Division.

Madam Speaker, there is also a need to extend the road from Nameka to Natuva Village. Like Vatukarasa Village, Natuva is also accessible by the Lomaivuna Road to Natavea Village, and thence by boat across the Rewa River. If the river is flooded, they have to travel through Nukurua Road to Nameka, and then walk for several kilometres to the village. Madam Speaker, during the recent Elections, election officials had to be ferried to this location by helicopter. This is how difficult it is.

Madam Speaker, the villagers do not need a helicopter, they need a road.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, there is also a need to construct a road from Nukuloa Village in Lutu, to Colata, the site of the government-developed Malotolu Cocoa Project. The road would then link back to Nayavu on the King's Road.

Madam Speaker, if the above roads are constructed, they will open up thousands of hectares of agricultural land with huge potential for commercial root-crop cultivation, and also beef and dairy farming. This will be the answer to the shortfall of milk production that we are currently facing.

Madam Speaker, there is also a need to tarseal the Dawasamu Road from Queen Victoria School (QVS) to link up with the Kings Road at Mataso. This will open up the coastal area for tourism development. We already have the Takalana Bay Resort with the popular Rainbow Reef famous for dolphin watching and two other hotels currently under construction. Madam Speaker, this will also be the alternative route to Suva or Lautoka, if the Wainibuka River is flooded.

Madam Speaker, Tailevu North has a very serious water problem. This was evident during the recent drought. This should not be the case, as we have a good water source at Namau in Sawakasa, which can meet the needs of the villages between QVS and Korovou Town and along the King's Road to Nadaro Village in Vugalei. It can also service the six villages in the district of Verata. I understand that this had already been surveyed by the previous governments, and ready for implementation once the fund is available. Madam Speaker, this is a problem and should be given top priority.

Madam Speaker, we have nine secondary schools in Tailevu North, including two of the Government's largest boys boarding schools, Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS) and QVS, and about 20 primary schools. All the students from these schools have to travel to Suva for every Milo or Coke Games for use of the all-weather athletic track at the National Stadium. Madam Speaker, it is time that we have the same facility in Tailevu North, together with a stadium and an international sized rugby field.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- This is to be home of the Northland Rugby Team.

(Laughter)

The facilities can also be used by students from Ovalau. The need cannot be over emphasised.

Madam Speaker, the extension of the Nausori Airport to a fully-fledged international airport is long overdue. The Nadali Village was relocated in the 1980s to cater for this. I understand that the landowners are willing to give their land for fair compensation.

The Nausori flights are very popular and always full. It is good to have an alternative international airport in a country the size of ours. I have had information that the Minister of Civil Aviation is looking for an alternative site for an international airport in Suva. I did not want to believe it, as the extension of Nausori Airport is high on the priority list. Madam Speaker, we do not have to look far. Everything is here, in Tailevu and as they say; "Tailevu no leqa".

As mentioned in His Excellency Address, it has been 27 years since the first *coup* happened in this Chambers and apparently, its effects still lingers in this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I tend to differ from the comments made by His Excellency in paragraph 11, page 9 of the *Daily Hansard* of 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2014, where he says, and I quote:

"Never before has the Parliamentary process been transparent, nor have our Members of Parliament been held more accountable".

Our Parliamentary system has always been transparent in the past, and the previous Members had proven that for themselves. We, the new Members of this august Chamber have big shoes to fill and are yet to prove ourselves. The track record of the Government for the last eight years contradicts such a statement.

Madam Speaker, the nation has recently completed the democratic process that allowed for the establishment of this Parliament. Regrettably, a majority of the citizens in this beloved country were not happy with the way the General Elections was conducted as a lot unanswered questions are still pending.

Madam Speaker, allow me to shed some light on Government's policy on the development of native land. We have noted that the Government has set aside about \$10 million for the *I Taukei* landowners for the use of their land for subdivision and development purposes. While this gesture is appreciated, this policy is, in my view, a short sighted initiative, as it only encourages landowners to subdivide their land and lease them out for 99 years.

Madam Speaker, God has stopped creating land long time ago. What we have now will not increase but members of the landowning units keep increasing every year. This would mean that the land would become less and less, for future generations. The Government is initiating to subdivide all the land and lease them out for 99 years, so the increasing landowners would have to live on the meagre income from the rent. This will create a lot of problems in future.

HON. LT. COL. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- The Government should tread carefully when dealing with Native land. Whatever the decision it takes, it should ensure that it will make the landowners happy. If the indigenous people are happy, everyone in this country will be happy.

HON. LT. COL. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- If they are not happy, it is almost guaranteed that everyone will not be happy.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (Ret) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We are happy now!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- It is, therefore, important that the Government create policies that are conducive to nation-building, and that would make everyone happy. The ownership of Native land is communal, by birth rights and very unique. You only have life interest, so it is important to make the right decision now, so that future generations are not or feel that they have been disadvantaged.

What the Government should be doing, if it is really genuine in helping the indigenous people, is to provide them with capital to do whatever they want on their land, so they can reap the maximum return from their investments. This option would make them asset rich, as well as cash rich. Leasing out most of their land for 99 years is definitely not the right option.

The TLTB is now being highly politicised. It should be allowed to perform its duty for what it was created for in 1948. The Government should lay its hands off TLTB.

HON. LT. COL. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- The policy decisions and the running of the TLTB should be for the indigenous people to decide and not the Government.

Madam Speaker, the idea of the minimum wage, as recommended in the *Reddy Report*, is a welcome policy. However, I understand that the Ministry for Labour had recommended a higher rate than that. It is also recommended that employers should be allowed to negotiate the minimum wage

rate with their employees, depending on the ability to pay and the type of businesses they operate. This will provide a win-win situation and cordial relationship between both parties.

Madam Speaker, the role of any government is to provide clean water to all the citizens of this country. The water infrastructure systems, however need urgent upgrading works, and funding will be required to conduct those upgrading works.

MADAM SPEAKER.- One more minute left, honourable Member.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, we are of the view that the issue of free prescribed medicine in our major hospital should not be encouraged, but provided at a subsidised rate. Costs will be at a very minimal rate and will also eliminate the handout mentality. Supply of drugs and other medicines are not provided free of charge by overseas suppliers.

The Bainimarama-led Government has indicated that they will provide 250 millilitres of milk a day to children enrolled in Year One by the first-term of 2015. Where will the Government provide money to purchase the milk? Fiji cannot even meet its local demand of milk. If it is to provide free supply of milk to all Year One students, then obviously milk will have to be imported and that would be an expensive exercise.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I beg your indulgence. We only have two more speakers left and I propose that we carry on and adjourn Parliament at lunch hour.

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, I am proud to be here today as a representative of all Fijians, after our first truly democratic Elections, where each person's vote carried the same value.

As a Fijian woman, I am also very proud to be part of history – as a member of the first Fijian Parliament with a female Speaker, and a Parliament that is made up of 14 per cent of female Members. I congratulate each and every woman for achieving this success, and for ensuring that women's voices will be heard in Parliament. We are dedicated to continuing the policies of the honourable Prime Minister in providing women equal opportunities in all fields, including education and business.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I wish to reiterate my fellow honourable Members in commending His Excellency the President for his inspiring Address. His Excellency, indeed, defined this new chapter of Fiji's history as, "the launch of a new and true democracy."

As part of the FijiFirst movement, led by the honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji, I will serve to my full ability in achieving our vision for a better and a new Fiji, where all Fijians will be better off. The honourable Prime Minister, Sir, Fiji needs you. I will always be by your side in serving all Fijians. I will do my best to assist my Minister in delivering the highest quality performance of governance to all Fijians.

In making my decision to stand for the Election, I must give credit to the honourable and learned Attorney General and Minister for Finance, Public Service and Public Enterprises for being instrumental in convincing me that Fiji needs "doers rather than talkers". We all know that he has led by example in this regard. I would not be here if it were not for the steadfast support of my FijiFirst

team in Savusavu, my extended family and friends, and especially my husband Tim and my three children - Bianca, Skye and Fim, for being my pillars of strength.

I was blessed to be born and raised by loving parents, who were dedicated to my success. My parents understood the importance of education and although I was one of the seven, they managed to somehow get us all educated and for that, we are forever grateful.

There is, no doubt, that Fiji's commitment to provide a free and full primary education to every Fijian student must be understood as the very foundation of our future prosperity. For me, education has been a constant presence in life. A turning point came in 1982 when I was bestowed the title of "Miss Hibiscus", an experience that helped me develop skills that were fundamental to my professional and personal achievements. I encourage all young Fijian women, if given the chance, to seize this opportunity, as it would open up the world for you and instil a confidence that will stay with you forever.

I began my professional career, following in my family's footsteps in civil aviation. My father, Ken, worked at the *Fiji's Airways* (which later became *Air Pacific* and is now back to *Fiji Airways*) for 30 years as Engineering Manager, and my mother Mollie, who is of Rotuman and Gilbertese descent, ran her own Fiji Sky Tours Business out of Nausori Airport. I started off as an agent with *Continental Airlines*, then became a Flight Attendant with *Air Pacific* for a short period, before moving on to *Qantas Airways* as a Supervisor at Honolulu Airport for five years.

When I returned to Fiji, I made the shift into the hotel industry as Manager of Wakaya Island Resort and was part of a small team that created *Air Wakaya Limited*. Then in January 1996, my husband Tim and I purchased the Savusavu Hot Springs Hotel.

During my time as a hotel proprietor, I learned the vital contribution that small businesses made to the Fijian economy, both in terms of injection of capital from tourists and through direct employment, creating and sustaining livelihoods of thousands of Fijian families. My experience as a business owner made me determined to use my position, to help other Fijians, and I was able to use my work as a founding member of our Rotary Club, Savusavu Tourism Association and other community-based organisations, to give back to the beautiful people of Savusavu.

After years of successful, rewarding social work and business in Savusavu, it was time for me to do more that would benefit the community beyond my horizon over Savusavu Bay - to give to the wider community and pursue the wellbeing of all Fijians. That is why I stand before this Parliament today, to do whatever I can to help Fiji and all Fijians continue to grow into a fair, modern and prosperous future.

Madam Speaker, as you will hear from the honourable Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism in detail, our vision is to, in all endeavours, achieve and expand sustainable growth in the tourism industry for the economic benefit for all Fijians. The tourism industry is the leading growth contributor to the Fijian economy. The tourism sector employs directly and indirectly, approximately a third of Fiji's total workforce, and it is our mission to help the industry create even more jobs. Tourism is by far Fiji's largest foreign exchange earner, contributing an estimated 37.1 per cent to the GDP, including approximately F\$2.85 billion in foreign exchange earnings.

Coming from the industry myself, I see a number of areas where improvements can be made. However, this cannot be achieved solely by the Government. There must be co-operation and equal participation by all the stakeholders. The Ministry will take a deliberate, inclusive approach in the development of policies. That is, we will listen.

We are reaching out to the Private Sector of the tourism industry and ask that you accept our hand of partnership in our common goal of taking the industry into the future that is profitable for all. One step is to pursue a plan to improve data collection and research through the Hotel Intelligence Survey (HIS). This will result in A more useful information on the occupancy rate, visitor trends and their needs throughout the year.

We must plan for the future and decide how the tourism industry must grow in the long term, adapt to changes in the market, and explore every opportunity to increase the number of visitors. I will use my personal experience in the industry to provide new insights to the decision making process, especially when looking at where we want the tourism industry to be in the next five years and incorporating those goals in our 2020 plan. In this regard, infrastructure is the key. The Ministry is working on a Fijian Tourism Development Plan (FTDP) that will tie in with the Government's overall infrastructural development plans, a plan that will lead to more investment and, therefore, revenue from tourism services.

We are aiming high. With better infrastructural development in the next four years, visitor arrival numbers can be increased to close to one million, and our revenue from tourism to, at least, \$1.5 billion. We also plan on spreading the tourist dollar beyond the shores of Viti Levu to the outer islands, including Vanua Levu, Taveuni and Kadavu. Our focus will be on improving sea and air access to these remote areas. This will help build sustainable growth for the country as a whole.

Tourism Fiji will be empowered to focus on new markets with renewed vigor. Whilst we continue to concentrate on our traditional markets of Australia and New Zealand, we will also use our strategically located Tourism Fiji Offices and Trade Commissions to increase visitor numbers from Asia, the Middle-East, the United States of America and Central America. Toward this end, tourism operators must re-strategise and repackage their products to meet the needs of new markets, such as Asia. Asians visitors from China and India are high spenders and are loyal to the Fiji brand. Other sectors must get in synch. To serve these visitors and attract even more tourist spending, our retail outlets must begin to offer more high end brands and products that attract upscale consumers. To continue to increase the flow of visitors from Asian markets, the Government will work with *Fiji Airways* to establish more code sharing arrangements, making use of the Air Services Agreements (ASA) that Fiji has with countries such as China and Singapore.

Madam Speaker, the importance of modernising the Nadi and Nausori Airports cannot be over emphasised. This is the true testimony of the Fijian Government's vision to have an integrated approach to enhance visitor experience through high quality and modern facilities, to increase frequency of flights and increase the overall flight capacity for guests to arrive in our country.

Madam Speaker, this year, Fiji established itself as the top golfing destination in the Region. The inaugural Fiji International Golf tournament, which was held in August this year, is the beginning of the Government's five year agreement with Professional Golfers Association, Australasia. It is a substantial new stage on which we are extending our reputation as a top tourist destination, and showcasing our nation's extraordinary natural beauty.

Additionally, the Super Yacht Industry is developing as a valuable niche tourism market, and is adding to our economy. The direct contribution by the yachts and super yachts market in 2013 was more than \$23 million, and is expected to grow further in the short to medium term.

We have other important segments of the Industry such as cruise ship visits that will be further developed, in tow with developments to our ports and port of calls. Our vision is for Fiji to be the

tourism destination that people from all over the world will travel any distance to come because as our motto goes: "Fiji is where happiness finds you".

Before concluding, allow me to bring to the attention of this Chambers two other key roles that I, as Assistant Minister for Industry and Tourism, will fulfil. In line with the vision of the FijiFist Government, it is my duty to ensure that the grassroot communities are provided the best services and are recognised for their contribution to the Fijian economy. In line with the Civil Service Reform, we will address the concerns of clients and implement changes that will ensure effective service delivery.

The provision of services to the micro, small and medium enterprises through the Department of Co-operative Businesses was reformed in 2011. We will now examine the efficacy of these reforms and strengthen the Department where necessary.

Furthermore, consumer protection and maintenance of fair play and order in the marketplace is another key role. The Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards will be modernised to meet the demands of the current market.

Madam Speaker, I again would like to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to address the House. I wish to thank my supporters for choosing me to be your representative, to speak for you, to bring your dreams to life and to be part of the revolution that will give you a future that we will all be proud of. May God Bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.— Madam Speaker, let me also congratulate you with your accession to the high office of Speaker. The next four years will be very important for Fiji, driven by the will and energy of this august Chamber which I know will deliver through your stewardship.

Let me take this time to thank my supporters, especially my wife, who was beside me during this campaign, a campaign that was both enjoyable and very difficult, given the short time that was given to us to prepare ourselves for the campaign; my immediate family who was also there with me and my village from Sila.

I come from Sila Village, Madam Speaker, which is a small village in the district of Cuvu in Nadroga. Immediately when I was appointed, I gave them the role to lead my campaign which they did willingly, and they linked me to all my people of Malolo, Nadroga Navosa; from Namatakula to Korotogo; from Mataqe to Yako; and to the islands of Yatu Malolo. If you can indulge me a bit; "*Vinaka vakalevu dina na veitokoni a mai rawa e ke na veidigitaki a dola kina nikua na Palimedi*", particularly to people who were part of me from the other generations. And it was a journey that was joyful, meaningful and one that strengthened me and made me realise that the calling here is one that I have looked forward to for about some time, following my services in other parts of this country.

I was initially a librarian out of high school, then I became a banker, I then became a hotelier, then I became a CEO to Fiji Visitors Bureau which was my last posting. And I also served as Chairman of the Fiji Rugby Union. In all these years, the preparation was there and I was always hoping that one day, I would sit in this august Chamber – sitting here at a stage in my life where I can contribute to the development of our country, and I believe it is here today and I am very grateful to my Party for giving me that opportunity to be a Member of Parliament and serve the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, my village Sila, is very tiny but it is famous in Nadroga. In that, it was the site of the arrival of Christianity in Nadroga/Navosa and indeed, the Western Division. The story is a very

interesting one and I would love to encourage honourable Members to come around there, and I will show you the commemoration where we commemorated the arrival and tell you the whole story about it.

Madam Speaker, suffice to say that one of my elders was sent by the Ka Levu at that time (1848) to go to Bau and bring back Ratu Cakobau's religion. He had heard about it and he wanted it - the Ka Levu, our paramount chief. My elder went first to Burebasaga and he was told in Burebasaga that Christianity had moved to Viwa in Bau. When he went to Viwa, he was too late – everyone who had been trained for the mission had left and there was no one left. Except for one. His name was Penijamini from Dawasamu but he was a leper.

Leprosy had advanced to a very serious stage but he was trained in the work and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. My elder said; "I'll take him". On the way back by boat in those days, and a leprosy could not relate to water, he died at Namatakula. Prior to dying, he told my elder; "remove my clothes. Take these clothes, the power of God is in these clothes. Take it to the Ka Levu". He buried Penijamini of Dawasamu in Namatakula and took the clothes to the Ka Levu which had the power of God. Today, the people of Sila are known as the people who brought the Christian clothes. *O ira era kauta mai na i sulu ni lotu*. That is what we are, that is our heritage. Madam Speaker, I am very proud of it.

That leads me to my concern with today's Constitution where it says that religion is personal. My heritage is different, my religion is Christianity and it has a public profile to it. I believe that in September, the Archbishop said it himself that when you have faith, you want everyone to know about it – you express it. You cannot keep it to yourself. This particular clause in the Constitution could be interpreted as that, your religion is personal and it could mean, "keep it to yourself". I know it may mean something else but to the vast majority, it could mean just that. I would ask that we relook at these aspects of our Constitution because a significant part of the population in this country are Christians, and we need to put Christianity back into the Constitution in the way it was.

Madam Speaker, you can relate to this; in a Fijian village or setting, there is the *mataqali*, the *yavusa* and there is the *tokatoka* so everything we do is focussed on our Christianity, on our Christian belief. If you create a sense of confusion with this, turmoil will result. The very structure that we enjoy of goodwill, love and all those will disappear gradually over time. I would urge this House, and I know it is hard to change some aspects of the Constitution but this is one that we cannot afford not to relook at.

I am a Christian person, I helped create the image of Fiji in our marketing, and one of the images of Fiji is our Christian belief. We all saw last night, after prevailing over Samoa in the Gold Coast, Australia, Osea Kolinisau brought his team together and prayed. The whole world watched that and that is the image of Fiji. That is the image that we should keep, and I am afraid that if we continue and leave the Constitution as it is without making it more responsive to Christianity, I think we will lose out a lot, Madam Speaker. I would urge this august House to do this.

We, as Christians, also know that our fundamentals are based in God, and if we do not, I can only quote what Isaiah said in Chapter 29 Verse 13, and I quote: "The wise will lose their wisdom, the intelligent will lose their intelligence". It can happen in this House, Madam Speaker, we all know and we can relate to that. I would wish that we relook at that as a people. We look at the part of the Constitution on Christian rights for this country. We are not talking about five per cent of the people, we are talking about more than 60 per cent of our people, who adhere to the teachings of Christianity.

Madam Speaker, the Titanic with the small change in its direction would have avoided disaster. At this juncture of our journey in this new dawn, I ask this House to realign ourselves, realise this truth and make these amendments at this point in our journey forward. That to me, Madam Speaker, is very much part of my Christian heritage and I would love this House to consider it very seriously.

Madam Speaker, we move on to tourism. I spent many years in tourism. Over the last couple of days, my colleague from tourism who spoke earlier, talked about \$2.8 billion in tourism earnings. When I ran tourism marketing in the FVB, I was the CEO for a number of years, we knew that billions were available but I began to ask a question; "Billions for whom?"

I thought of ways to make that billion dollars spread across the community and one thing, Madam Speaker, I would like this House to take on immediately is a service charge for all our hotel workers. Service charge is shared by all the workers in the hotel, paid for by the guests or visitors. Everything that is consumed in the hotel takes on a charge which is then shared equally amongst our people. This is practiced in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and in many destinations of tourism, Madam Speaker. So I would like to urge this House; "Please, think about our hoteliers, think about our staff". They are well looked after, they are almost door to door, with transportation, meals are provided, good uniforms with footwear, very pleasant work environment but the pay is still very low. Let us apply ourselves in a bipartisan way and make service charges part of our tourism industry, to benefit our hotel workers.

Madam Speaker, I am also one who believes in the localisation of positions. There are too many expatriates in this country.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Tourism as it is now can rely on our own people. I ran the Fiji Visitors Bureau (FVB) for five years. I had locals looking after Los Angeles, Sydney, Auckland and looking after our office in Fiji. Today, Madam Speaker, none of those locals are still there, except one. What happened to them? They were delivering the billion dollars that we wanted. I would like to see more of our people get back into tourism in a meaningful way. I am part of a generation who should have been a general manager earlier in my life but it did not happen until late because I was not given the exposure. We need to trust our people. We are not giving them the opportunity to run things and they would have done it. I would like this Government and this Chamber to continue to encourage our people to advance in their career, not only in tourism but in other fields.

Madam Speaker, as we sit here today, Fiji Airways can be run profitably by locals - CEO, pilots, engineers, support staff, marketing, you name it – Fiji Airways today can be run profitably by locals.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- We should make the effort to make our people be more responsible, and given the exposure to run things.

I was concerned when it was said to some people; "If you cannot do it, I'll find someone else to do it for you". That is wrong, Madam Speaker. I would say; "If you cannot do it, I will train you to do it." I will bring in expatriates as a stop-gap measure but not expatriates to come and take over everything that is ours. Madam Speaker, that is my passion – tourism, my people. I would like them to be part of this in a big way.

When you talk about sharing the billions, there is also the natural resources of our people. Let me touch on a few - Tavarua is one of the most beautiful reefs anywhere in the world, I believe it is in the top 10. I was driving through Los Angeles once and I saw this huge billboard. This beautiful image of a beach and waves – that was Tavarua and the most beautiful name on the sign was “Fiji”. I said, “that is where I come from”. That is the attraction, that is what brings people to this country.

Mostly, the owners of the reef must earn royalties. They used to, that is, the people of Nabila and Momi used to make royalties out of Tavarua Reef but today, it has been stopped. The billion dollars for whom? I keep asking this question. Namaqumaqua used to make \$45,000 a year for the use of their reefs, it has stopped. Madam, \$45,000 in a village can go a long way in upgrading the standard of the village.

The people of Beqa, I do not wish to be outside of the momentum that is here today but, Madam Speaker, I keep asking the question; billion dollars for whom? I want a billion dollars to be shared equally amongst the people, the opportunities are here to have that done in a way that we could all be proud of.

I will touch a bit on land as I come from the sugarcane belts. When I was campaigning, we talked about land and I told them, “I was very fortunate that at a very young age, I saw land being given to the farmers under ALTA, and I consider myself fortunate to be still alive to see land returned to the owners.” Given in good faith and returned in good faith, that is the way it should be. Land must be given in good faith, and returned in good faith on the understanding that we will together agree and make sure that come a time, landowners will be able to use the land for themselves. The land bank, Madam Speaker, frightens me. I wish we could go back to the days of the past where we could deliberate, sit down and talk about these things and come up with things like ALTA.

On minerals, the West also has a lot of minerals. I would like to see more development in the West. Vatukoula Emperor Gold Mines, in particular, was started in 1936, I believe, it is now the third or fourth generation of miners in Vatukoula. They can do it. Our people there are now good miners, they can mine for us. I think it has changed hands too many times, and it is not good for Fiji that we are not mining our gold to export overseas.

Madam Speaker, that is all I have today, more will be said over the next five years, but again, thank you very much for the opportunity to be speaking today, and congratulations once again on your appointment to your high Office.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, it being 12.57 p.m., pursuant to Standing Orders, the Parliament is now adjourned until 9.30 a.m. tomorrow, Tuesday, 14th October, 2014.

I would like to remind the honourable Members of the Business Committee that a meeting will be held in the Committee Room at 1.45 p.m.

I will now leave the Chair pursuant to resolution of Parliament, and will resume the Chair again at 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.58 p.m.