

SECOND DAY

Wednesday 13 October 2021

DRAFT HANSARD

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CORRECTIONS TO DAILY DRAFT HANSARD

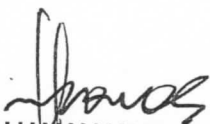
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HARRY MOMOS

Principal Parliamentary Reporter

SECOND DAY

Wednesday 13 October 2021

The Parliament met at 10 a.m.

The Deputy Speaker (**Mr Koni Iguan**) took the Chair.

There being no quorum present, the Deputy Speaker stated that he would resume the Chair after the ringing of the bells.

Sitting suspended.

The Deputy Speaker (**Mr Koni Iguan**) again took the Chair at 10.40 a.m., and invited the Member for Nawae, **Honourable Kennedy Wenge** to say Prayers:

“Yu strongpela God, inogat wanpela God i stap bihain long yu o God, God bilong i stap oltaim oltaim. Mipela long dispela moning yu bugim mipela long kam stap insait long ples bilong kibung na stretim dispela kantri long gutpela tingting na gutpela save. Olsem mipela i askim yu long spirit bilong tok true na stap givim stia long mipela long tok true long laip bilong mipela. O God mi beten long Praim Minista na ol Membas na mi beten tu long Oposinsin Lida wantaim Sadow Ministas na olgeta insait long dispela bung long brigim sevis i go long pipol na welfe bilong pipol na ol pipol i hamamas na givim yu yet we yu yet i bin skulim. Nau long dispela taim tu kantri bilong mipela I fasim bikpela hevi long Covid-19 na plenti ol i die na bilip bilong ol i lus long yu, tasol dispela sik i kam long yu na yu save na em i kamap. Na stia tok i kamap long dispela floor yumi bilipim na yumi wanbel na givim sevis i go long Health na Health Minista long mekim dispela wok i kamap na sik i go daun long laik bilong yu tasol, long nem bilong Jesus pikini bilong yu na mi beten long dispela moning, Amen.”

QUESTIONS

Tax Credit Scheme Facility

Mr SASINDRAN MUTHUVEL – Thankyou Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to direct my question to the Minister for National Planning and Monitoring. My Deputy Speaker, the wet

season is fast approaching. West New Britain is one of the most disaster-prone provinces. There was a moratorium in 2017 for all tax credits and the former minister called for review which was completed in 2018.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the tax credit scheme was back at the end of 2018. West New Britain Palm Oil being one of the major companies within our province, does help during the time of disaster, especially when bridges collapsed or road network is cut off between Kimbe and Bialla. But they have applied, since the beginning of 2019, and they are still waiting for the approval from the Department of Planning.

(1) Can the Minister give some assurance that this tax credit projects will kick start for the benefit of our people in West New Britain and also various other parts of the country?

Mr RAINBO PAITA – Thankyou Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Governor for his question in relation to tax credit scheme.

Firstly, my Department implements the tax credit scheme in terms of projects that were approved by previous governments to increase tax credit scheme to two percent. I want to assure this Parliament that consultation has been done with revenue agencies like IRC and Customs that are responsible for collecting revenue. Because when we talk about tax credit scheme it's about advancing tax for government programs like roads and other facilities that are done by tax credit scheme programs.

02/02

There are a couple of companies that do tax credit schemes and for the benefit of this House, these companies would be; Ok Tedi Mining Limited, Porgera Mining, Newcrest Mining, Oil Search, ExxonMobil, New Britain Palm Oil, Agro Oil Palm, Ramu Agro Industries, and others are engaged in tax credit scheme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the consultation that happened has gone through already and I would like to advise that all consultations have been sent through my Department to Treasury. I have signed the letter this morning, coincidentally advising the Prime Minister and Treasury Department to expedite that process. The letter that we sent to Treasury went through that so we can expedite an increase to the two per cent ceiling that the government has decided on.

To the Governor and other provinces that are implementing Tax Credit Scheme, the issue was the increase of two percent.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the holdup is we are waiting for Treasury to come back to me and in a conversation with the Prime Minister, two weeks ago he asked me to expedite from Treasury in consultation with the Treasurer, if we can bring that forward so we can have that two per cent to do projects that those companies are doing in terms of tax credit scheme.

To the Governor, I will make this my business as I have signed the letter today and copied to the Prime Minister asking for that document to be expedited. So, we can increase and at the same time deal with those tax credit scheme programs that are happening in our country as well. We have done our share on our part with the National Planning as the implementer. Now, it is only Treasury to expedite paper work on the increase and also getting back to us so we can expedite this week. Then, I can have a confident answer once Treasury gets back to me and the people of West New Britain who were affected by those issues in terms of tax credit scheme programs.

Mr NAKIKUS KONGA – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I direct my question to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Inter-Government Relations to take note.

Mr Deputy Speaker, my questions are in regard to the issues of greater provincial autonomy or to be more precise, the issue of greater power sharing with the National Government including the little framework that governs the system of decentralizing powers to provinces.

Mr Deputy Speaker, allow me to give a brief outline of our quest for greater power sharing to inform Honourable Members of this House before I ask my questions. The quest for greater power sharing has been an important development program for the Government and the people of East New Britain for a very long time. It has taken us 22 years to come this far with our campaign for the empowerment of our province.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the purpose of our request is to regain those essential powers for effective and productive governance that were lost as a consequence of the reform to the provincial government system in 1995. Under that reform, the original *Organic Law on Provincial Governments* was abolished and replaced by the current *Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Governments*. The most important part of those powers taken away by the reforms include; financial, administration and political powers. These powers are most essential for effective government operations, financial sufficiency, social and economic development, good governance and prosperity of the provinces. Their aim is to encourage provinces to be self-reliant and the services sustaining instead of depending on the

government for goods and services. My people work hard and we also contribute meaningfully to the coffers of this country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the implementation of the current OLPG and LLG in 1997 gave another blow to our prospects of recovery from the volcano disasters. Under the reforms, development in East New Britain began to slow down and as time went by, my people began to experience hardship in their livelihood.

03/02

Their sad situation of hardship continues today. Our roads are currently unfixed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the economy of East New Britain is struggling. Our infrastructure like roads, airstrips, education facilities, health facilities and power supply are all in danger of collapsing. Once upon a time, East New Britain had the best road system in the country but today without adequate funding as a useless Department of Works facility in Kokopo, we have some of the worst roads in the country –

Mr Kobby Bomoreo – Point of Order! Mr Deputy Speaker, can he please ask his questions? He is giving a report about his province so can he find another time to give that report?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Your point of order is in order! I will ask the Governor for East New Britain to get to his questions.

Mr NAKIKUS KONGA – Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker. These questions are very important for the benefit of all of us and this Parliament.

My questions to the Prime Minister are:

(1) Why did the Minister for Inter-Government Relations treat our three provincial committees in a careless manner or was its insubordination on his part in relation to autonomy to be granted by the National Government?

(2) When will your Government introduce the Organic Law on Decentralisation Bill in Parliament for passing?

Before I ask the third question and as a reference point, the three provincial committees of Enga, New Ireland and East New Britain have spent a lot of money on working towards the requirements. We are only waiting for the Department of Inter-Government Relations to

give us the okay so we can proceed with the final parts of our work for NEC and Parliament. We have put a lot into these works since given the okay by the former Prime Minister, Honourable Peter O'Neill in October 2018.

The O'Neill-Dion Government in 2012 declared Alotau Accord I and later the O'Neill-Abel Government declared the Alotau Accord II as policies adopting autonomy as the key policy and undertook to grant autonomy to East New Britain, New Ireland and Enga.

(3) Why has your Government not implemented the Alotau Accord policies to grant autonomy powers to East New Britain, New Ireland and Enga?

(4) If your Government is taking too long to put in place an Organic Law on Autonomy, then, is the National Government prepared to allocate the K300 million unconditional grants per year to East New Britain to enable us to achieve the level of development we want?

Mr JAMES MARAPE – I thank the Governor of East New Britain for his questions on the issue of autonomy. These are very important questions because this is one of our ongoing contemporary issues currently between our subnational and national governments.

I want to state here that my Government has not overlooked or forgotten the talk about autonomy. I want to apologise if the Department of Inter-Government Relations has ill-treated your committees. I do not think that this was the intention.

When we took office, we looked into who was able to sustain their autonomy. Therefore, instead of cosmetics and pleasurable talks like what the O'Neill-Dion Government and O'Neill-Abel Government did for eight years. It was more than sufficient time to arrive at autonomy.

04/02

Mr Speaker, in these last two years we have advanced on this discussion in the law to find a suitable clause where autonomy will not harm national unity and at the same time empower them to function well. Not just functional autonomy but you come back to Waigani for funding.

We are looking for a suitable clause in the law which gives you the ability to raise your own revenue. This is causing the delay in the provincial and local-level governments to fully move into the discussions on autonomy of provinces like New Ireland, Enga and East New Britain.

In my view East New Britain Province is amongst the first provinces which is really qualified in the sense that their provincial and local-level government systems are functioning and they sustain their revenue without extractive industry funds.

Honourable Governor for East New Britain Province, your province is over qualified even when it comes to the revenue which is collected. The province can manage the revenue and run the provincial government functions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I as an individual, believe in the concept of decentralisation because our country is made up of a thousand different cultures so that the idea of autonomy is in order. We just have to ensure that autonomy does not come at the expense of national unity but you as a province must have the financial ability to raise revenue and we are trying to include that into the idea of autonomy.

The difference between the *Alotau Accord* and *Loloata Policy* is that the *Alotau Accord* only talks about functional autonomy which is no different from the provincial government concept where autonomy was included. The *Loloata Accord* wants to match that but include also that you raise your own provincial revenue, retain it at that level then the balance be given to the national government to run the functions at the province and the country as a whole.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to give assurance to the honourable Governor that we started this discussion in Alotau in 2012 and I wish it was completed in 2018 as you mentioned. When that decision of autonomy was presented to you, it was just talk but there were no changes made in the law so now we are working on those changes.

Mr Nakikus Konga – Point of Order! Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. My point of order is that, I think the Prime Minister is misleading the Parliament. In 2018 I increased the revenue collection in the provinces by K25 million but unfortunately, I lost it all because of the Covid-19.

Now let me assure that if it is given to East New Britain –

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable Governor, if you are trying to debate the answer that the Prime Minister is giving then I will not allow you to raise that point of order.

So, I will ask the Prime Minister to complete his answer.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, the leader is going through an issue but I invite you to come and see us and we can see what the provincial government can show you and what we are doing. We are supporting the idea of autonomy but want the provinces to function well and raise their own revenue so that they can attend to the health centre, roads etcetera, which is the district or provincial governments and we will come in at the national level. We do not want to leave loose ends.

Look at your generation in 1995, when the Provincial and Local-Level Government Law was passed and today we still are carrying-on the legacy of mismatch. This legacy of mismatch is because laws were passed to suit your emotions at that time and we do not want that. We are trying to pass proper laws which are attached with clear demarcations of their functions.

Today the law that was passed some years ago on District Development Authority is being contested again in Court because some leaders think that it does not fit in well in the *Constitution* or the *Organic Law of Provincial and Local-Level Government*.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am in full support with the Governor on autonomy but I want to deliver a product which is solid and it can sustain itself like you said you can raise you own revenue. That is good but don't just get policies, there must be a law in place to support you raise revenue to run your province.

05/02

So, the intention is similar but the focus of the current government to empower the law to raise the revenue in the province and the National Government will not question all the time especially in attendance to your provincial functions at your level.

So, will get back to the East New Britain Provincial Government on where we are and by way of responding to these questions. The Inter-Government Relations Minister can also attend to him and his team and will update the other two sister provinces that at no time we are ceasing the idea of autonomy but we want to give a product that is full and it's achieving intention instead just of cosmetic approach.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Pila Niningi – Point of Order! Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I want to let the Governor for East New Britain know that the governor's council meeting – ,

(Members Interjecting)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, the Chair will not entertain you; resume your seat.

Mr AIYE TAMBUA – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Before I ask my question, for the record, I want to state my appreciation to the Prime Minister, Government House and Minister Justin Tkatchenko for organizing the state funeral and recognizing the late Governor-General, Sir Silas Atopare.

Sir Silas Atopare was the Seventh Governor General of Papua New Guinea and he was also the first Member for Goroka. And for the record, on behalf of the people of Goroka, I thank you all people involved for arranging a dignified funeral service for our leader.

Thank you.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I direct my question to the State Enterprise Minister. A couple of years ago Goroka urban authority transferred some of its assets, especially water to Public Enterprise. Those assets were transferred basically so that Water PNG can invest and developed the water supply system in Goroka Town and up until now there have been several visits by engineers of Water PNG to Goroka. But since then, we have not seen or heard from Water PNG the status reports of all these visits.

Mr Deputy Speaker, what is the plan for Goroka Town water supply system and can the Minister state when he can address the water problem in Goroka Town?

Thank you.

Mr WILLIAM DUMA – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I like to thank the Member for Goroka for this question.

Mr Deputy Speaker, unlike all the other towns which were under the *National Water and Sewerage Act*, Goroka was the only water district that was still under the control of the Goroka urban LLG and only three years ago, I as Minister responsible by Ministerial Determination in the National Gazette, declared Goroka to be a water district and thereby making Goroka come under the ambit of Water PNG Limited.

Unfortunately, even despite the gazette notice the urban LLG and our leaders did not accept that and they wanted to have discussions with Water PNG. They wanted some monetary compensation for the transfer of the functions so discussion then came to a hold

and then we had the change of government and ministries. So, some delay was caused by these but Goroka still remain important. Towns like Kundiawa and Goroka have had so many recurring water problems.

06/01

In fact, Goroka's problems are now being given priority and the good Member has seen me on two occasions and I have made it my duty to ask Water PNG to give it some attention and work is being done now. This Government has not forgotten the people of Goroka. We made a payment of K3 million to the landowners to recognise their rights under the existing systems. I assure the Member for Goroka that both Goroka and Kundiawa are important areas that need attention and Water PNG is actually working on it. I should be in a better position to report to the good Member on what we are working on over the next couple of weeks. So, I thank the good Member for Goroka for this question.

Supplementary Question

Goroka Water Supply MOU

Mr PETER NUMU – Mr Deputy Speaker, in the previous government, we made arrangements for the provincial government and the urban LLG and Water PNG to enter into an agreement or MOU. In that agreement Goroka water supply was to have a company in charge of that arrangement where the shareholders would include the provincial government, the local level government and the district and Water PNG would be the management team over the Goroka water supply. In this MOU, the PNG Water Board had a clause in this agreement where they want any funds from outside to be kept in the trust account to be controlled by themselves, that is where the holdup is.

Can the Minister speak with the board to find a win-win situation for all parties?

Mr WILLIAM DUMA – Thank you Governor of Eastern Highlands province for your question. I want to start by emphasising to all of us that we must not forget the fact that water is not owned or created by any of us, God created water, so no one has 100 per cent ownership over water. They can only have access rights, right throughout our country. If we as leaders allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by competing demands of our people, who do not create or own water, we are opening the flood gates for problems.

Mr Speaker, that does not mean to say that we will ignore the wishes of our people. They will still continue to remain important stakeholders. In the case of Goroka, we are looking at options. This situation also applies equally to the people of the Sirinumu Dam area. We want to see whether we pay user or access rights, knowing very well that no one owns water. We pay our landowners who happen to be the stakeholders and guardians of this valuable resource.

The user access rights. We can do this through a combination of shareholding company or through a structure where our landowners rights have greater mention. This government, led by our Prime Minister, has always been cognizant of the importance of our landowners and the Prime Minister has directed me to look into this closely. We are working on a structure that we can hopefully present it to our landowners from Goroka and Sirinumu and hopefully we can be able to accommodate their interest; however, I must remind us as leaders that we will not simply give into the landowners and give them everything they want. There must be a balance. So, we will work out a solution in the end.

07/02

Mr Robert Agarobe – Point of Order! Mr Speaker, even though we know that water doesn't belong to anybody, we do have instances when we built dams and vast amounts of land that belong to the people are taken up by the dams. So, this has to be taken into consideration when such decisions are made on how compensation and royalties are paid to the landowners.

Mr SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, continue with your answers.

Mr WILLIAM DUMA – Mr Speaker, it seems that we are looking at the issue of water user rights and that includes compensation for our people whose land are taken up by the water because of the dams. So, it is part of the consideration as well.

What I am saying is that we are looking at offering a package that is acceptable to the people of Goroka. As we all know, Water PNG is in the process of a merger with Eda Ranu and once the merger process is completed by the end of November, then, we will have a solid company that will be able to look at those outstanding issues.

I will then be able to provide a good response to our Member for Goroka as well as the Governor of Eastern Highlands.

Central Province – Need for Doctors

Sir PUKA TEMU – My questions are directed to the Prime Minister. Can I be able to give a very short preamble?

Last night my Central Province leaders and I, led by our Governor, had the privilege of attending a briefing by the Central Province Covid-19 Task Force. It was in that briefing that, certain worrying issues were raised to us, leaders, in the Central Province.

One very sad issue that was raised was that because Gerehu Hospital and Port Moresby General Hospital are filled with victims of the current spike of Covid-19 in the city and elsewhere in the country, a couple of Central Province patients were sent back from Gerehu Hospital, PMGH and private clinics around the city.

We as leaders in that meeting last night discussed many, many issues including the issue that our good Governor has been raising on this honourable floor of Parliament, and that is the recognition of Central Province in the National Capital District.

Our understanding of the Task Force advice is that Central Province is also, with NCD, beginning to see the spike extending to the villages.

The second issue that came out succinctly was that we only had one doctor in the Central Province who is managing this Covid-19 spike. He travels from Kairuku-Hiri to Goilala to Rigo and to Abau. The reason is that under the previous arrangements, under the provincial health authority legislation, Central Province Health Authority had its nominated hospital as Kwikila Health Centre. Kwikila Health Centre is just a health centre but it was declared a provincial hospital, and there lies the biggest challenge for us in Central Province. We were given a health centre to be our provincial hospital by declaration of the then Minister.

And now, with the spike in Covid-19 we only have one doctor and so the request was, let's find some funding and the doctor said, I need two other doctors.

08/02

Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister because we were informed last night that your Cabinet –

Mr Win Daki – Point of Order! I thank the Honourable Member for the points he has raised, but as the former health minister, has he done anything for the people of Rigo? Can he attend to the people before asking questions to the Prime Minister?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, your point of order is out of order. The question is very important to our people as it concerns lives, so I will allow the Member for Abau to ask his question.

Build Central Provincial Hospital

Sir PUKA TEMU – Mr Deputy Speaker, this demonstrates misunderstanding towards the people of Central Province. That is exactly the issue I wish to address.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we discussed a couple of options. Our patients are being turned away because we only have one doctor. Kwikila Health Centre was nominated as a provincial hospital and so we were looking at options. I was thanking the Prime Minister earlier because we were advised by the Honourable Governor of Central and Minister for Transport that the Cabinet has approved the building of the Central provincial hospital. This has been a long-awaited hospital because to date this project has been approved three times. It was first approved in the Somare-Temu government then in the O'Neill government, and now, Mr Prime Minister, in your government.

When will the funding be provided for this project? From the briefing last night, the building design is yet to be finalised. This means the tender process will be next year, so we are looking at another four years for its completion.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I have two questions to ask the Honourable Prime Minister and the Health Minister can take note.

When the Cabinet approved the Central provincial hospital, I think a contractor was already awarded at the same time. My understanding is that the current spike or peak will not happen until another two or three months later, so we are looking at December. With the current situation where Gerehu and Port Moresby General hospitals are filling up, the Aquatic Centre will also be filled up. This means we have to make an urgent decision, and at the backdrop of the Cabinet's decision to build a Central provincial hospital there are governments around the world that can build a Covid-19 hospital within one week. Given the current spike in Covid-19 and from my understanding that it will peak later on, this is the right time for the Government to make a decision quickly.

Mr Richard Masere – Point of Order! I do understand the importance of this question and as leaders of this House, I think it is important that we start encouraging vaccination. It is the solution to the problem. Building of hospitals will cost millions of kinas! Why can't we talk about vaccination – that is the solution.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Honourable Member, thank you for your concern, but it seems that you are debating the questions being raised.

Honourable Member for Abau, please keep your questions short so that the Prime Minister can respond.

Sir PUKA TEMU – Mr Deputy Speaker, again, that is another misunderstanding by a leader.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Sir PUKA TEMU – Typical misunderstanding by leaders!

Mr Deputy Speaker, the point is; with the current spike, the two hospitals in the city are already full. Patients particularly from the Central Province are being turned away, as of last night's report by our advisors. Therefore, I am asking through you, Mr Prime Minister, if a decision can be made in that regard. We have land in Bautama; we've already approved a hospital under the Prime Minister's leadership, and there are countries or our bilateral friends that can be asked to do phase one of a hospital as part of the strategy to look after the sick.

Honourable Member for Ijivitari, in the discussion we had, we actually said that Central Province will be pro-vaccine. That is what we will declare to promote vaccination in Central Province because that's the only way.

09/02

Mr Deputy Speaker, if that is not possible, honorable Minister for Health, I have already discussed this issue when Port Moresby General Hospital has a lot of doctors whilst Central Province under Covid-19 has only one doctor and we are struggling, Kwikila hasn't got many doctors.

Therefore, I strongly recommend and request the Prime Minister to instruct the Central Provincial Health Authority to nominate Port Moresby General Hospital as a hospital under the Central Province Health Authority. Then we don't have to go and look for two doctors outside the system. We already have many doctors at the Port Moresby General Hospital and it has 900 beds but only 30-50 beds are for Covid-19 patient. Can they extend and manage it accordingly? If we consider these two options then I believe Central Province people won't be turned away.

And lastly, the Hippocratic Oath that doctors make means that we are doctors without borders and we don't turn away patients of color, religion or any type of sickness.

The fact that patients are being turned away from Port Moresby General Hospital, Gerehu General Hospital and private hospitals is illegal and it must be stopped immediately by the authority. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Abau for his series of questions relating to our people's health which is no joke. I appreciate him raising it at this highest level where we should be sensitive to the plight of our people.

I will start answering from the last point he made; no doctors in our country should be turning away patients. The structural issues of different PHAs should not be the case in which patients are turned away. The issue on Central Province, I concur with him because Central Province has been without a provincial hospital for a long time.

Previous governments have made attempts to build Central provincial hospital. We have reviewed that and allowed for a hospital to be built at Bautama.

In fact, last year we allocated K10 million and another K10 million this year to clear the land in and around Bautama so that the hospital is built on a landscape area. So, K10 million was allocated last year and another K10 million for this year was appropriated in the context of extra allocations made to provinces and districts. As for Central Province, the Cabinet has already approved a permanent hospital to be built at Bautama.

We have three to four years remaining, so we want to deliver a nationwide program in building 21 provincial hospitals in each province and the 22nd is the Bougainville Regional Hospital. By the time we celebrate our 50th Anniversary Independence in 2025, our generation of leaders from both sides could have gifted to our nation, 22 functional hospital systems in our country to embrace our people's health.

What Covid-19 has shown to us is that we have inherited a dilapidated health infrastructure system as well as the nonfunctional health system and we can't pinpoint to anyone in the past. It is what it is and it was built up in the last 46 years. And we need to correct this on both sides now. Covid-19 is no joke and when it first occurred in our country all of us didn't know what Covid-19 was. And so, we all made commentaries against Covid-19 and vaccination by saying that it's unreal and it won't happen because we are a super-Melanesian race and our gene will resist Covid-19.

10/02

All this sort of things has been going on for the last year but by the grace of God, we have been spared the travesty of what happened in India and other places, it is now catching up on us, so we all need to step up.

Let me answer this question now and I thank the Member for raising this question. To the people of Central, the recommendation you offered is taken on board. First and foremost, the synergy between Port Moresby General Hospital and Central must take place.

Mr Health Minister, you must know that we are living in Central. So, the Port Moresby General Hospital and Gerehu Hospital must not turn them away. Whether they are NCD or Central, we co-exist. You and I know that the foreigners came and set the borders around NCD but we still say Central.

Mr Health Minister, please make sure because we have been co-existing all this time. At this time of Covid-19 we need to care for everyone, we cannot be turning away people from one province to another province. Whether they come from Gulf, Central or from another country, the Port Moresby General Hospital is a national referral hospital and it should be embracing all people. The discussion for temporary care for the people of Central and everyone across the country, in our Government Caucus meeting this morning, I spoke very strongly for the needs for all our Provincial Health Authorities.

Last year, Sir Puka Temu and I were at the National Control Center at Morauta House, and our conversation was on how to prepare for the worst-case scenario. I'm just sad that our provincial health authorities nationwide have not responded and stepped up, especially not only to the demand for the acquittal of more than K70 million that was given to the provincial health authorities but more importantly their plan on how we could physically address a nation that is hesitant in vaccination. And so, my instruction through the National Control Centre

to the Health Minister, is witness to it, has always been to build additional bed spaces, not the modern K300 to K400 million hospital that we are looking for. That can come but today we need to expand to address the need of hospital care because Covid-19 does trigger people, especially the five to ten per cent who would need oxygen to come to the hospital, so that instruction has gone out a year ago.

As I speak today, I am absolutely dissatisfied that the provincial health authorities have not sent in all their plans on how to build capacity on the ground in the respective provinces.

Central is an exceptional case, they don't have a physical site to work on and the reference for Kwikila to become a provincial hospital, I sincerely apologise to Sir Puka Temu, knowing that it is painful to be in this kind of situation.

We will look after a temporary health facility for Central. Central can be divided into three zones; Magi Highway, Sogeri Highway and Hiritano Highway. If the provincial health authorities could come and specifically divide the three zones and work out how we could have temporary measures to address them. They do not come most of the time to our city and if we need to mobilize doctors to attend to them within three zones then we can localise our people to where they are.

Mr Deputy Speaker, at the government caucus this morning, we discussed the need for a nation-wide isolation. And I appeal to our people that Covid-19 is real, and it kills. No medicine has been found on planet earth except vaccination to ensure that you are free from Covid-19. For those who don't believe in vaccination, there is no superstitious underworld that is running for vaccination. The vaccination is developed by USA, China, India, Europe, Australia and other advanced countries with lab facilities running trials to test these vaccines.

Today, the five WHO sanctioned vaccines have been inoculated to over 2 billion people globally. Tell me, if these two billion people are falling dead all over the world.

11/02

Those who are falling dead all over the world are the un-vaccinated, people who get Covid-19 facts and statistic must assist indecisions that we make in our country, whilst we choose at the national level not to encroach into people's personal preference of vaccines, but at a level where we operate in encourage people, vaccines are available, in fact our country was the among the first to have vaccines in our medical system, yet we choose not to have vaccinated. We encourage people to look at the vaccines as a safety tool to ensure you are equipped, but in the absence of the vaccination, please stay at home, don't come out, stay

where you are! Your safety is guaranteed, when you remain isolated from contact with those who have been vaccinated. I encourage Papua New Guineans that if you don't want to be vaccinated. Please you stay at home or at the village. If you feel that you are sick, call the hotlines, so we will get the Provincial Health Authority system to be activated, so you are responding to your people better.

Mr Deputy Speaker, coming back to the Central issue, your recommendations are in order. We will look into them to ensure how we activate the temporary mobile responses quickly to ensure that three roads linking to Central health responses to our people, and also ensure Port Moresby General Hospital and the NCD Health systems do not remove Central Province people away. They should interact, co-exist and work, so, that it also serves Central province. We will look into temporary facilities as we work the permanent set-up for Central and our country going forward.

I want to thank him for the good question, do bring your suggestions to the Central province. The Central Provincial Health Authority can come up with a clear invisible temporary as well as medium term and the long-term plan. This morning I announced in the Government Caucus, we are willing to unbundle quite substantial resource to gear towards Covid-19 and health sector alone, but it will not be funnelled to districts and provinces again. We will funnel to targeted approach to ensure we deliver outcomes, instead of throwing money away to provinces and districts with no outcomes as you have seen in one year.

Thank you.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 2020 – MOTION TO TAKE NOTE OF PAPER.

Mr JIMMY UGURO (Usino-Bundi - Minister for Education) – I present the following Paper pursuant to statute:

Department of Education 2020 Annual Report

Mr Deputy Speaker, I ask leave of Parliament to make a statement in connection with the Paper.

Leave granted.

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to present to this Honourable House the Annual Report for 2020 for the Department of Education informing Parliament of its performances, achievements and challenges faced in 2020.

Indeed, this is my first statement to Parliament as Minister for Education and I thank the Prime Minister Honourable James Marape for appointing me to this key Ministry on 23 December 2020. I also thank my predecessor, Honourable Joseph Yopyyopy for the work he did during his term.

The Marape Government continues to give priority to the education sector because education is a right for all girls and boys in Papua New Guinea. We are therefore committed to ensure that every child receives quality education; under a standard-based education system with a quality standard-based curriculum, 1-6-6 school structure, and a robust standards assurance system, that is subsidized by the government.

12/02

National Education System Functions and Responsibilities.

The developments, operations and management of the National Education System (NES) depends on partnerships from all levels of government, partners and stakeholders.

The National Education Board (NEB) is the highest decision-making body. It oversees the development and operations of the National Education System (NES), it develops and implements the National Education Plan (NEP), it advises the minister through the secretary on all matters relating to education in consultation with provincial governments, Teaching Service Commission (TSC), and education boards and agencies.

The Secretary for Education is the *ex officio* Chairman of the NEB.

The Department of Education's policy, priorities and programs are aligned to the *Education Act, Organic Law on Provincial and Local-level Governments, Medium Term Development Strategy, National Education Plan and the Department's Corporate Plan.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, the *Organic Law* limits the national department functions and resources in determining national policies and standards and coordinating their implementation through providing support and advisory roles to the provinces in key areas such as planning, research, training and staff development. This also includes teacher

education, teacher inspection and registration, determination of the national curriculum and production and distribution of national curriculum materials and examinations.

More detailed information on the functions and responsibilities of the National Department of Education, the provincial and district administrations and partners and stakeholders can be found in pages 2 to 3 of this report.

Achievements in 2020

The year 2020 came with a huge challenge worldwide with Covid-19 pandemic getting everyone by surprise but with the support of development partners, the department developed and launched the Education in Emergency Response and Recovery Plan (EERRP).

This Plan secured more than K30 million from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to fund key priorities. A further K10 million was secured from the Government of Australia to support water, sanitation and hygiene interventions in schools as well as provide Covid-19 support to secondary schools

Despite this, the department continued to implement Government policies and agenda and also made some remarkable achievements including;

- The completion of the National Education Plan 2020-2029.
- Continued implementing the Government's Tuition Fee Subsidy Policy,
- Completed the School Structure (1-6-6),
- Completed all writing and printing of Standards Based Curriculum for all sectors of education,
- Continued to provide quality education and training for teachers,
- Continued to advocate on alternative pathways such as TVET and FODE,
- Launch of the National School of Excellence (NSoE) Policy by the Prime Minister Honourable James Marape,
- Launch of the five-year FODE Strategic Plan by the Prime Minister, Honorable James Marape,
- Successful hosting of the Governors Consultative Forum on July 7 and 8,
- Successful hosting of the National Ratings Conference on July 13-17, MOU on the transfer of the NCD Education Services Division to NCDC was signed,
- The MoU's to decentralize the GTFS functions to ESP, Oro and EHP signed,
- The MoU's to decentralize salary functions to provinces continued with Oro and Central. We are targeting Jiwaka, Gulf, Hela and Southern Highlands in 2021.

Mr Speaker, when the Marape Government came into Office on 30 May 2019, we reconsidered the last Government's TFF Policy, reviewed it, and made education of our children a shared responsibility between government, parents, churches, NGOs and the local communities.

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The shift from free education to shared responsibility is to compel parents and communities to plough the soil and work hard. We want to cut out the dependency syndrome that was systematically allowed into our PNG culture over those six years.

Challenges

The major difficulties experienced in 2020 related to financing of core functions and schools, infrastructure, and provincial capacity to provide education services.

Mr Speaker, the Department's main challenge over the next ten years is

"to ensure that all our children complete 13 years of relevant quality basic education"

Apart from Covid-19, other challenges include; social, political, environment, population growth of 2.7 per cent HIV/AIDS, deteriorating law and order, transport, communications, infrastructure, low provincial capacity to finance, manage and deliver education and other services.

Manpower Ceiling

Mr Speaker, the manpower ceiling for the Ministry in 2020 was 1,041 public service positions, 2,401 teachers in National Institutions and 2,114 teachers in the National Capital District schools. This is inclusive in the total 64,531 teachers in the Teaching Service.

The manpower on strength was 832 public servants in the Ministry of Education, a reduction of 51 from 2019. They provide support services for general education, teacher education and technical and vocational education.

The total number of teachers reported to be on the payroll by Pay 26 in 2020 was 64,531. Detailed information about manpower can be found in the form of graphs and charts on pages 17 to 20.

Budget Appropriation

The Department received K640,997.55 million to implement activities and programs in 2020. This amount included funding for GTFS and Public Investment Program (PIP). There was a shortfall of K133,566.83 million.

The budget covers the National Department of Education, NCD Education Services and Teaching Service Commission (TSC), Office of Library and Archives (OLA).

Mr Speaker, the major concerns and issues in 2020 related to inconsistent funding for core functions of the Department, which I mentioned in my earlier part of the speech.

More importantly also, is the need for increased funding to implement the new school structure of 1-6-6 which requires huge capital investment.

Commitment

Mr Speaker, the Department of Education remains committed to the six goals of the International Conference on Education for All and has placed emphasis on quality education through all its programs and the aims and objectives of the National Education Plan 2020-2029 and PNG Vision 2050.

In 2021, it will continue to implement the following priorities:

1. Early Childhood Education
2. The Standards Based Education and Curriculum
3. Improved teacher training (improved teacher quality)
4. Technical and Vocational Education and Training.
5. E-Learning
6. Infrastructure development
7. Government tuition fee subsidy
8. Expansion of FODE
9. Enrolment in Secondary Schools and TVET centres.

14/02

Mr Deputy Speaker, in conclusion I thank the Prime Minister for his vision to leave no child behind and my brother ministers for their continuous support in the education sector. To the Governors and honorable Members of Parliament, I acknowledge your undivided support to education in making it priority under one in resource allocation in your provincial and district budgets.

I also thank our partners and stakeholders for their continuous support particularly the European Union, UNICEF, Australian High Commission, DFAT, Global Partners for Education, GPE, JICCA and others. I also express my appreciation to our many education partners particularly churches and NGOs. Finally, I thank the Secretary for Education, Dr Uke Kombra, his management team and all his support staff at the Department for the success

Education, GPE, JICCA and others. I also express my appreciation to our many education partners particularly churches and NGOs. Finally, I thank the Secretary for Education, Dr Uke Kombra, his management team and all his support staff at the Department for the success of 2020 and to the Provincial Education Boards, Provincial and District Education Advisors, School Boards, Principals, parents and guardians and the community. I appreciate all your support and looking forward to working with you in the near future, thank you Mr Deputy Speaker and God bless us all.

Debate (on Motion by **Rainbo Paita**) adjourned

**NATIONAL MARITIME SAFETY AUTHORITY – REPORT ON THE ANNUAL
PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MARITIME SAFETY
AUTHORITY, 2020 – MOTION TO TAKE NOTE OF PAPER**

Mr WILLIAM SAMB (Goilala - Minister for Transport and Infrastructure) – I present the following Paper pursuant to statute.

National Maritime Safety Authority Annual Report 2020

I ask leave of Parliament to make a statement in connection with the Paper;

Leave granted.

Mr Deputy Speaker, before I present my statement, I would like to acknowledge the hardworking team from NMSA, industry partners, local communities in PNG especially in Samarai-Murua, Esa'ala and all stakeholders on whose behalf I present this Report.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity to make a brief statement to this Parliament and the Honourable Members on the Annual Performance and Achievement of the National Maritime Safety Authority (NMSA) during this Covid-19 global pandemic period 2019 to 2020.

waters. The NMSA is also responsible for ensuring compliance to relevant PNG National Maritime.

15/02

The National Maritime Safety Authority also responsible for ensuring compliance to relevant Papua New Guinea National Maritime laws, and the international obligations and commitments under the International Maritime Organisation Conventions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, first I have the pleasure and honour to inform this Honourable House about the work of the National Maritime Safety Authority, especially the achievements in attaining a satisfactory level of safer maritime transport to protect lives and cargo and ensure cleaner marine environment to protect our seas and coastal areas.

I do so, in accordance with the national maritime safety authority act of 2003, which places maritime transport sector under the minister responsible for transportation matters.

In this connection, Mr Deputy Speaker, let me begin by way of introduction to inform Parliament that the maritime transport sector comes under my transport and infrastructure ministerial portfolio, The National Maritime Safety Authority, is a competent government statutory authority responsible for the maritime transport sector in PNG. The authority is governed by a board with representational membership from the national government agencies, the shipping industry and the civil society or community. The authority has been in operation for 15 years since 2006 as a national maritime regulator and administrator, building capacities and systems to be fully compliant with national standards and that of The International Maritime Organisation or IMO.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the functions and responsibilities of the national maritime safety authority were previously under the Department of Transport.

Mr Deputy Speaker, this changed when the NMSA was established through an act of Parliament, creating a clear demarcation of key, functions across the maritime transport sectors and agencies such as the PNG Ports Corporation Limited and the Department of Transport.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Papua New Guinea is a member state of the IMO which is a specialised United Nations agency responsible for regulating shipping and maritime safety. PNG became a member state when the country joined on May 1976. Today, PNG is one of the 174th member country to IMO. As a member state of IMO, Papua New Guinea is bound by the obligations of the treaties under the (IMO) conventions to ensure safety of

vessels and safe navigation in its territorial waters. As an IMO member state. Mr Deputy Speaker, Papua New Guinea is also obligated to meet the requirement of the IMO. Papua New Guinea is required to develop and maintain a comprehensive maritime legislations and regulations to promote safer shipping, cleaner marine

environment, and maritime security, to ensure effective and efficiency of shipping and international trade.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the country's commitments and representation and at the IMO is bestowed on the National Maritime Safety Authority through its Act of 2003, and therefore, NMSA is recognised by the IMO as the competent maritime authority, regulator and administrator in the country. The national maritime safety authority is established to perform these above core critical functions. As such, the authority gets audited by the (IMO) periodically to ensure that NMSA meets the international standards of IMO.

Mr Deputy Speaker, to move NMSA forward, a new five-year corporate plan was launched in June 2021, which I was personally given the honour to launch the plan. To compliment the new plan, NMSA is finalising its new organisational structure aligned to NMSA's evolving roles and projected future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, in terms of complying to the IMO standards and requirements, I am pleased to inform Parliament that, in the recent past, Papua New Guinea has ratified well over ten (10) IMO conventions and enacted a total of nine (9) maritime legislations and thirteen (13) maritime regulations.

16/02

Work on the review of legislations:

(1) The review of *Merchant Shipping Act 1975*, which is now the Merchant Shipping Bill 2020. (2) The revised *Small Craft Act 2015*. (3) *Maritime Search and Rescue Act 2020*, and other subsidiary legislations and regulations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to also inform parliament that work is progressing on the regulations relating to marine orders, merchant shipping (pilotage) regulations, merchant shipping (STCW Convention) regulations and marine pollution regulations.

There are however, Mr Deputy Speaker, other important conventions that PNG has yet to ratify. These conventions or treaties include; International Mobile Satellite Organisation (IMSO) Convention and Maritime Labour Conventions (MLC) 2006. These conventions and

related supporting legislation will be passed by Parliament in the not too distant future to fully satisfy the requirements of a flag state and port state responsibilities.

The National Maritime Safety Authority is therefore, adamant to consistently facilitate the work on the ratification and drafting of necessary domestic legislation to be passed by Parliament. On this note, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am seeking full cooperation and support of the Office of the Legislative Counsel and the Office of the State Solicitor in progressing legislative drafting work and undertaking legal clearance processes to enable passage of these important maritime legislations to Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker, with all these responsibilities, the National Maritime Safety Authority has to sustain its operations to meet its domestic commitments and the international obligations set under the IMO. On this outset, I wish to emphasise that over the years the National Government grants to NMSA was to the tune of only K2 million on average annually.

I therefore would like to seek support from the Finance Minister to ensure that sufficient funding is always made available to the National Maritime Safety Authority so the authority is able to fully execute its mandated functions of maritime safety and protection of marine environment. Due to insufficient government funding, and the need to sustain its operations as a statutory authority, NMSA appealed to the shipping industry for the revision of the levies and fees that it annually collects from the shipping industry.

These levies and fees are used by the authority to fund its maritime safety programs and activities, and also for the maintenance, repair and upkeeping of navigational infrastructure and establishing the maritime technology to satisfy the international maritime requirements under its mandate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, let me stress that, keeping the navigational lights alight to provide safer passage for vessels travelling in our waters and moving passengers and cargoes to and fro, is of critical importance for this reason, the levies and fees collected by NMSA are significant for NMSA to provide services to the stakeholders in the industry and the people of PNG in fulfilling its overall mandate.

The levies and fees collected are not for profit generation but to ensure the maritime industry operates in the best environment to serve our people with the movements of cargoes and people. In addition, ensuring safety of navigation for both domestic and international shipping vessels and to cater for emergencies such as oil spill, search and rescue to save lives at sea is critical.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the National Maritime Safety Authority was audited by the IMO in 2016. In addition, the financial performances were audited for accountability purposes by the Auditor-General's Office to fulfil requirements under the *Public Finances (Management) Act* and to ensure transparency.

Mr Deputy Speaker, NMSA is also expected, by the shipping industry and wider stakeholders, to provide the best maritime safety environment in Papua New Guinea. While this function is very important to the national interest of PNG, the Covid-19 global pandemic has constrained and put stress on the authority to fulfil its legislative mandate.

17/02

Despite the many hurdles, I am pleased to inform this honourable House that NMSA has delivered many results to benefit Papua New Guinea.

The achievements of NMSA didn't happen overnight, it is therefore appropriate that I, as Minister responsible for the transport sector, acknowledge the efforts and the contributions made by the previous transport ministers and secretaries in ensuring that the transport sector, particularly the maritime subsector, continues to develop and improve the necessary services more effectively. In this case, I thank Mr Westley Nukundj, the former Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as Minister responsible, I take particular interest in the developments that are happening in the maritime transport sector, especially in terms of policy, compliance with the national policy initiatives and the IMO conventions and policy requirements.

In 2016, an IMO Standards Audit System was conducted by IMO on NMSA. One of the key recommendations was for Papua New Guinea as an IMO member state to develop and adopt a National Maritime Transport Policy. Thus, I am pleased to report to Parliament that NMSA is progressing the work on the National Maritime Transport Policy (NMTP) for PNG.

Mr Deputy Speaker, one of the great milestones achieved by the National Maritime Safety Authority was the declaration of the Jomard Passage in the waters of Milne Bay Province as a "Particularly Sensitive Sea Area" (PSSA) by the International Maritime Organisation.

According to IMO, this is a ship routing measure that provide safe passage to ships. This achievement itself gives PNG an international recognition and status.

This achievement was made possible with the support of the Milne Bay Provincial Government. I therefore acknowledge the contributions and participation of all the leaders involved and the Milne Bay Provincial Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, according to international standards of IMO and the Guidelines on Safety at Sea, NMSA also undertakes flag state control inspections of domestic ships and port state control inspections on foreign vessels including the LNG ships calling in at the National Ports.

NMSA also undertakes activities relating to coastal state responsibilities. this is also in compliance with the PNG National Maritime Safety Legislations and Regulations. In this respect, NMSA has stepped up to the challenge to be able to undertake inspections of LNG vessels which was not done before.

In anticipation of the new LNG Project, more ship inspectors are needed to boost the manpower of NMSA.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the National Maritime Safety Authority is working closely with the PNG Maritime Training Colleges in the area of training and qualifications of PNG Seafarers. NMSA is conducting regular audits on maritime training institutions on various training courses and instituting IMO Seafarers Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) quality procedures to appoint qualified and experienced persons as examiners for masters, mates and engineers. NMSA also conducts regular oral examinations for near coastal and STCW certificates of competency and external evaluators and varification of sea service intending candidates.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as Minister responsible, I am thrilled to note the great strides and developments by the authority. therefore, I render my full support to NMSA for the ongoing investments and commitments.

The *Medium-Term Development Plan III*, shows the government's keen interest in the maritime transport sector to develop the shipping services and improve the maritime infrastructure especially the installation and maintenance of aids to navigation throughout the country.

18/02

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is with great satisfaction to also report to Parliament other milestone achievements in the area of search and rescue. The national maritime safety authority has procured three search and rescue boats to undertake search and rescue

operations. The two boats are in operation while the other is yet to be delivered. The delivery has been delayed due to Covid-19. On a brighter note, we are grateful for the Japanese government under JICA which has concluded an MOU with NMSA in assisting PNG with three bigger multipurpose search and rescue boats. The boats are purposely built to also conduct search and rescue duties.

Mr Deputy Speaker, NMSA has stepped up efforts in setting up the latest digital information platform, particularly in the Search and Rescue Information Management System (SARIMS), the Automated Information System (AIS), oil spill equipment and Coastal Monitoring System (CMS).

Mr Deputy Speaker, in the area of ship registration, NMSA has successfully restored the integrity of PNG ships by updating ship registration. NMSA cleared ships that do not exist and deregistered vessels sold or wrecked or no longer in operation. NMSA is now able to maintain PNG ship registration on a daily basis as well as the PNG ship registration information system. NMSA has also established effective communication with ship owners in this respect.

Mr Deputy Speaker, NMSA has also invested in establishing the regional centers in the provinces. So far six regional officers have been established in Alotau, Lae, Madang, Vanimo, Kimbe and Rabaul. NMSA is expanding to other ports and is working to acquire land to build offices. This is part of NMSA's decentralization efforts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, these achievements by the national maritime safety authority has raised the bar for other regional maritime safety authorities. This, I must boldly underline, that the national maritime authority has been a silent achiever in many respects.

Mr Deputy Speaker, a safer maritime transport and cleaner marine environment comes with huge costs. For instance, the aids to navigation cost substantial amount of money annually to service and maintain. These infrastructures are so crucial to ensure safety of ships, passengers and cargo at sea because the lights provide safe navigation passage for ships passing in and out of PNG waters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, this activity has been supported through the Asian Development Bank under the national maritime waterways' safety project. Let me at this juncture, on behalf of the Marape/Basil government, take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the ADB for the assistance provided to promoting the maritime safety. In the same vein, I also extend the Marape/Basil government's acknowledgement of the great assistance provided by

bilateral partners particularly; the governments of Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, Korea and also international organizations of the United Nations in the transport sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as government, we have a responsibility to provide safety to our travelling public at sea. we have a responsibility to protect lives at sea. As I speak, may I reiterate and remind us of the everyday dangers our people face at sea when travelling in dinghies and small crafts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, in terms of small craft safety, the National Maritime Safety Authority has reviewed the 2011 Small Craft Act and currently undertaking regional awareness on the implementation aspect of the Small Craft Act. The Maritime Safety Authority has moved to decentralize the Small Craft Act functions to the maritime provinces. The implementation of the small craft act is being rolled out to the 15 maritime provinces. The project is extending small craft safety responsibilities to the provincial governments and their administrations to co-ordinate. In this light, the provincial governments are urged to embrace the program by establishing their provincial small craft registries and provincial small craft boards.

19/02

Responsibilities to the provincial government and their administration to coordinate. The provincial governments are urged to embrace their program by establishing their provincial small craft registration and provincial small craft boards.

Mr Deputy Speaker, can be part of their revenue generating mechanism for provincial governments because a larger population in rural costal islands and communities use small craft and banana boats, dinghies for transport and cargo. Let me also inform this honourable House that I am happy that small craft incident and casualties have been remarkably reduced from 2018 to 2020, marine accidents were reduced from 178 to 103 in 2020 whilst persons missing at sea were reduced from 172 in 2018 to 83 persons missing at sea in 2018. In the operation of overloading in 2020 NMSA recorded nil boat accidents and passenger missing at sea. This is a greater achievement for NMSA and the country in terms of maritime safety.

Mr Deputy Speaker, so far 14 out of the 15 maritime provinces have setup small craft provincial registration boards to register small craft and issue licenses to boat operators, such as skippers and boat owners in the provinces. I am appealing to only one province to make safety at sea a priority for the people and establish their small craft registration and boards. You know this province.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am satisfied with the achievement by NMSA and hopefully through this statement the honourable Members of this Parliament can now appreciate the mandate and the operations of the National Maritime Safety Authority. This was not done when the authority was established in 2003 and subsequently it commenced operation in 2006. This achievement therefore set the bench mark upon which future work would follow suit. Therefore, I wish to acknowledge the current board and management for their efforts so far.

Mr Deputy Speaker, on behalf of my hardworking staff at NMSA our coastal communities, partners, industry I therefore, thank you and this Parliament for the opportunity to present the status report of the NMSA, I thank you Mr Deputy Speaker.

Debate (on Motion by **Rainbo Paita**) adjourned.

RESPONSES ON THE UPDATE OF COVID-19 (DELTA SURGE) – MINISTERIAL STATEMENT – PAPER NOTED

Mr JELTA WONG -Thankyou Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Pomio for his questions which I will present a written statement so that the people can have a clear understanding of the pandemic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, like many countries around the world today, PNG faces a great threat, this is a pandemic of the magnitude that the people of planet earth have not seen since the Spanish Flu 100 years ago, but its much worse because of the transmissibility of Covid-19, particularly the Delta Strain. Firstly, on behalf of our Parliamentary colleagues we extend our deepest condolences to the families around the country who has lost loved ones to Covid-19, this includes the provinces of Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands and many other provinces that are entering the dangerous stage with this pandemic. Our range of focus measures have been implemented in containing the spread of delta in hotspot provinces.

20/02

- This is having some success, but the challenge before our healthcare workers is immense.

Official Figures and Actual Numbers

As of this morning, the total official number of cases of Covid- 19 in Papua New Guinea is 23,365 from which, official figures are that 252 have lost their lives.

But let us all be realistic; the official figures are nowhere near the actual numbers in the provinces. Just like other developing countries that have suffered a Third Wave of Covid-19 surge, with the Delta variant: The undeclared number of infections and deaths is much higher. As we all know, when one of our people dies in the village, it is likely that the cause of death will not be known and it is possible their deaths will not be recorded. This gap in figures is not just because of the underfunding of our healthcare system for several decades, it is also because of the reality of being a developing country and the challenges of data collection. I think everyone of us in this House knows of people who have died in recent weeks and months from respiratory problems, we might think that they died of TB or Malaria, but in the village, we often don't know for sure the cause of death. We are hearing of people who have been a close contact and have gone into isolation, only to die within days in their homes or hotel rooms. So, we as a Government, and as a people, have to be honest with ourselves and recognise that Covid-19 is much worse than the official figures.

Vaccination

Mr Deputy Speaker, in relation to vaccines: I agree that our people must have correct information so they can decide for themselves whether to be vaccinated or not. This has been happening for several months now, in the press and social media, on billboards, buses and information papers.

- UNICEF has been funded to take the lead on national communications and we will seek further review of where this money is being spent and have them step up their efforts.

- Right now, we are seeing the most honest and brutal communications about the suffering and loss of lives from Covid-19. The dangers posed by Covid-19 is being broadly shared in newspapers, on television and on radio. And while social media often causes trouble with fake news the photos and videos, we are seeing of body bags and grieving families today are disturbing and they are real. I urge people to share their experiences with friends and family, and further spread the word of what you are experiencing. Don't be sensational, but state the facts of your true experiences and images of how dangerous Delta is to our people. The spreading sickness and deaths we are seeing right now is also proving to be a big motivator for people to get vaccinated. Demand is rising considerably, so much so

that while a few months ago we had vaccines expiring; and, now the government is looking to bring in new doses before the end of the year to meet supply. In relation to the honourable Member's first question in relation to how many of the recorded Covid-19 dead have been vaccinated: The answer is zero. That leads straight to his second question: And the current PNG data is showing that all the deaths so far are among the unvaccinated. This is in line with International and global observations. Therefore, the drive to save lives using vaccines is highly supported by the current government. The third question relates to the percentage of the vaccinated compared to those unvaccinated who are currently admitted to the hospitals: The latest figures are that 98 to 99 percent of Covid-19 hospital admissions are people who are unvaccinated. One hundred percent of patients in critical care requiring oxygen are not vaccinated. These are published facts.

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When you are fully vaccinated and there is a slight chance you contract Covid-19, you might or might not have symptoms, and you would be highly unlikely to get a serious infection or need hospitalisation; and when you are vaccinated there is very little chance you can pass Covid-19 on to other people. But, if you are unvaccinated, and you contract Covid-19, depending on your social situation, you will likely infect many more people. Getting vaccinated keeps your viral load low, therefore reduces your chances of transmitting infections. This is the difference because when unvaccinated you could be responsible for the deaths of your elderly relatives, and with Delta, even the serious infection in children. At this in time there is no point of vaccination for children. We are using World Health Organization numbers and the vaccine is only for 18 years and above. This is the point of vaccination and it is central to what the Prime Minister has said; that we must be vaccinated so that we can learn to live safely with Covid-19 and fully re-open our economy.

We are assessing the allowable age range for vaccination, as has been done in many countries. But, for now it is the responsibility of parents, guardians and teachers and all adults to get vaccinated and create a safe environment for our kids.

Mr Deputy Speaker, in relation to the fourth question on provision of supplies and support, there is a significant amount of personal protective equipment, or PPE, that has been distributed to all the provinces but the lack of visibility on usage and remaining stockpiles is proving a challenge and better data and feedback systems are being developed.

This includes the National Department of Health building up dashboard to better monitor this data. There are more supplies to arrive in country in the pipeline. This is also critical as the priority provinces have changed and the consumption of essential supplies and equipment is higher than initially anticipated.

The supply of oxygen continues to be a challenge. This is due in part to unpaid government debts dating back nearly five years, and the challenges of ensuring the supply of cylinders, and return of empties, over such vast regions of our country. I have instructed all provincial health authorities to submit their surge plan budgets, which includes clinical and non-clinical surges capacity requirements. We are facilitating support from the National Government and provinces will be made aware of it in the coming days.

Mr Speaker, surge capacity assessments conducted by the provinces to guide formulating them in their respective surge plants. Surge capacity assessments entailed all aspects of the response including: human resources, equipment, isolation beds, isolation wards, testing capacity, lab consumables, and PPEs. The PNG National Emergency Medical Team and the first of its kind in our PNG has been deployed to Western Highlands, Eastern Highlands and Western Province to support the surges. Arrangements are also in progress for United Kingdom Emergency Medical Team to assist PNG through the UK High Commission. The World Health Organization has put out a call out for International Medical Teams to assist PNG. And we are also talking with other bilateral partners for the same thing.

Mr Speaker, in relation to fifth question, the WHO has developed guidelines on Covid-19 therapeutics which is regularly updated. The WHO fully supports the approach that Covid-19 can be prevented by strict compliance to the niupela pasin. This includes masking, maintaining social distance, and hand sanitising and this must be complimented by vaccination.

There are different phases of this disease, and treatment needs to be tailored to each phase. Most people have mild or moderate symptoms, and a large number of people don't even have symptoms.

22/02

However, as we know, some people develop severe symptoms.

There are recommended uses of therapeutics with proven effectiveness in Covid-19 patients. Oxygen is one of the most essential treatments for saving patients with Covid-19. Dexamethasone is also an inexpensive drug with proven effectiveness in reducing deaths in

people on oxygen. Interleukin-6 receptor blockers are another class of drugs that target the overreaction of the immune system. These are medicines that will help stop the Covid-19 within your body, it doesn't heal straight away.

On 6 July 2021, the WHO also issued a strong recommendation for the use of interleukin-6 receptor blockers for severe and critically ill Covid-19 patients. These drugs improve survival and reduce the need for mechanical ventilation among hospitalised patients. Although these are life-saving drugs, unfortunately they remain inaccessible and unaffordable for most of the world. The WHO and our Government calls on manufacturers to increase access to these drugs for developing countries.

This is also a time when we need to put any party or personal politics aside in the interests of National Safety. As our country deals with this crisis it is no time for senseless politics. We need all Leaders to put differences aside, and work with a common resolve to fight back against Covid-19.

I ask how many Leaders in this House have been encouraging their constituents to get vaccinated? How many leaders are standing up and joining the Prime Minister to push for greater vaccination?

We all know the state of provincial health services, and with the wider uptake of vaccines, our people will not add to that burden. Vaccination keeps people out of the healthcare system.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am challenging all Governors to sign Tripartite Agreements with the Prime Minister and myself as Health Minister. This will set targets for vaccination uptake, alongside greater access to resources that are needed to drive demand. We need to work together to get more vaccines out in your provinces.

Sadly, some non-believers in this House have stood up and spoken against vaccination and contributed to fake news. Some have even claimed Covid-19 is not real which is ridiculous considering the number of deaths we are now seeing from the Delta strain.

Our country needs all Leaders to be responsible on this important matter to be responsible with your words and actions. One hundred per cent of deaths from Covid-19 are people who were not vaccinated and people who thought home remedies and steaming themselves would protect them from Covid-19. Many of those who have died from Covid-19 would have heard misinformation from some Leaders or read fake news. I call on those doing the wrong thing to stop causing this divide and confusing our people.

I am happy to take any Leader who claims Covid-19 is not real to come with me to Goroka Hospital, Hagen Hospital or Angau. I will take you to the Port Moresby General Hospital today and show you how real Covid-19 is, and how it kills. This is time for strong leadership, so don't gamble the lives of our people on political grandstanding. United as a Parliament, with a common cause to protect our people during this crisis, is our shared responsibility and sworn duty.

Ultimately, Mr Deputy Speaker, this crisis descending on our country is of biblical proportions. It has brought sickness, death and sorrow upon our people, and this situation will get worse before it gets better. As Delta spreads throughout Papua New Guinea, from district to district and town to town, we all have to do our part. We have to do our part to stop the spread especially people who are not vaccinated. This means wearing face masks all the time when in public spaces, and keeping social distance. It means washing your hands, and not coughing or sneezing into areas where there are other people. Most importantly, to do your part to protect yourself, and more importantly, to protect your family get vaccinated. Get vaccinated to stay alive.

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Mr Speaker, while I have the floor, let me remind this Honorable House, that a united stand to vaccinate will keep our country healthy. We only have to see our neighbors in Indonesia and Fiji, that their numbers of vaccination are much better than ours. And they will open up to the world, and the world will open up to them because their people have embraced vaccines as the safe way out of this pandemic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and God bless our country.

Dr LINO TOM (Wabag – Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources) – I move -

That the Parliament take note of the Paper.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I take this opportunity to thank the good Health Minister for his outstanding leadership during this period of crisis.

The confusion caused by leaders in our society including leaders in this House who opposed government policy and strategies against Covid-19 is causing havoc and devastation across the nation as we witnessed today.

Mr Patrick Pruaitch – Point of Order! The minister for Health was answering questions; it's not a statement that we need to debate on. These are answers to the questions raised yesterday and he took note to make a reply today. So, is it appropriate for us to debate answers to questions during Question Time?

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER – Honorable Member, the question was raised yesterday but the Minister is answering the questions in statement form, therefore, the Parliament can debate on his statement.

Dr LINO TOM – Thank you, Mr Speaker. To eliminate an infection like Covid-19, like we did polio a couple of years back, we must reach herd immunity. Herd immunity happens when more than 80 per cent of our population is actually immune to that illness. And to be immune to that illness we need to arrive at that immunity level. Immunity happens through two measures; (1) when you get actively infected with that disease; (2) through passive means, such as the vaccination measure that we are actually promoting as a government.

Now there are two pathways. Immunity is very specific in that it means that when a virus like Covid-19 attacks, the body evokes a very specific response in that it creates immunity against that infection that is quite specific in nature in chemical structure. So, for our body to arrive at that juncture, it happens through two measures; either when you are actively infected or when you receive vaccination.

The things that the government is doing right now in terms of putting in isolation strategies and Niupela Pasin, these are all temporary measures that we are putting in place. Eventually, we have to get our population vaccinated or immune to this disease. And if we wait for people to be actively infected there is no guarantee that people will survive an active infection.

Mr Speaker, the data we have currently shows that immunity prevents severe infections and vaccination prevents death, but if we allow the people to go down the pathway of being actively infected, there's no guarantee that people will not die. Because of that the government policy which is based on solid scientific data now promotes vaccination which our Health Minister is strongly advocating on this Floor of Parliament.

Some of the measures that we have put in place like isolation and Niupela Pasin are just temporary measures so that our population can reach that herd immunity level. So, when provincial governments implement these measures, it doesn't mean that we actually brought in the solution for Covid-19. No! We must still vaccinate our population and that's the final thing. If you look at Australia, they actually shut down all their borders to get their population vaccinated and it is happening all around the world. So, when we talk about measures, we should heed the advice from our Minister for Health.

Once we put in these temporary measures like Niupela Pasin and isolation and once that is happening, we must ask our people to come and get vaccinated and that's the only way. Covid-19 will not go away because you are isolated or you are practicing Niupela Pasin; this pandemic will still be around.

We eliminated polio because we vaccinated the entire population and achieved herd immunity. That's why I want to elaborate clearly here because we are coming up with all sorts of ideas and really confusing our people. There is no way around it but we have to be vaccinated first to reach herd immunity. If we don't get vaccinated then eventually, we have to fall sick so we have to be actively infected for our body to develop that immunity so that we can reach that 80 percent rate that will enable us to reopen our borders again.

The other point I want to explain further is vaccination. Any new form of treatment goes through four stages of clinical trials. The first phase involves the process of determining the right dosage. Second phase is the initial safety and efficacy phase, meaning we check whether that dosage level is effective and able to carry out its duty. Third phase is the late stage to test the safety and efficacy the dose. After that, we go through phase four which is ongoing to see whether there are short or long-term side effects on patients and that takes about five years. Right now, we don't have five years because people are dying right now.

All the vaccination which the Department of Health has introduced to this country has reached the third phase already. That means that we must not believe in false information circulating in the social media and internet saying, 'that no adequate testing has been done and I don't want to become lab animal.' In clinical medicine they have reached that level already. We must advocate vaccination now. We can't wait for five to ten years; people will die and it is happening now. We must educate our minds. When making public statements, as I mentioned earlier, just because Google is providing all this information it doesn't mean that all of us are experts in medicine. It takes five years for people to go through training for a

reason. You have to have this contextual knowledge to actually qualify you to make interpretations on what you see on Google or what you read. Therefore, I want to inform this Parliament and the nation that all the vaccines that are available to us have actually reached those three phases already. As for phase four which is ongoing studies to determine whether there will be some short or long-term bad effects, it will take five to ten years. As I mentioned, we can't wait for five to ten years because people will die. This is not a chronic illness but acute illness that kills people right on the spot.

I want to encourage all the leaders in this House whilst you put in measures to temporarily prevent Covid-19 the long-term answer to Covid-19 is vaccination. But if you don't get vaccinated then there is only one option; you develop immunity by active infection where there is no guaranty that you will survive an active infection. You won't be like Father God to foretell your future. The Delta variant that is now causing havoc around the country can also kill healthy people.

So, I strongly emphasize here; please listen to the Minister for Health and adhere to what has been said as a nation. Our Government's policy is to get people vaccinated and that's a policy and we must rise above politics and we speak as one voice.

25/02

As a Nation, our Government's policy is to be vaccinated and we must all rise above politics and speak one voice. Don't read on Google and come back with all kinds of conspiracy theories that leads us to confusion.

I would like to make a short statement because we are leaders, it is causing a big impact in our country. So, please we have to speak one message. I'm yet to receive any evidence that that a vaccine has caused death in this country.

Right now, the vaccination hasn't caused any death as yet but vaccination from the available data now and internationally has shown to lower the severity of Covid-19 and is preventing the infection. We have solid scientific data to prove that.

Any Government policy must be driven by solid data, we must not listen and believe anyone including street doctors, medical and herbal practitioners. Again, the Government policy and data policy must be driven by solid scientific data.

Finally, the Melanesians may think they have some special power within their immune system to prevent Covid-19. The only people I know in this world right now, is a special group of people from Scandinavia who have a receptor called Kimokin Receptor 5 that

prevents HIV and any viruses that enters the cells. That is the only scientifically proven documented group of people who are immune to HIV. I am yet to receive more information relating to any illnesses in this world.

I also don't know where the street doctors are getting information, that PNG has some special immunity to prevent infections. We must all abide by the rules because this is a national crisis that is causing a lot of deaths throughout the country and people are losing their relatives. I have also lost five relatives in two weeks. This is painful and we can't even stand losing a relative too, whether it is a father, child or a daughter. Those people who have a loss are affected by the comments on Covid-19, we are hurting these people.

Mr Speaker, I support the Minister for Health for the statement he has made on this Floor. The only solution in preventing and eliminating this virus is to vaccinate 80 per cent of our population. There are two ways you can reach herd immunity; one is through active infection and the other through vaccination which is also the fastest way to reach immunity.

Like I said, there is no guarantee that when you become actively infected, you will survive. The best thing to do and proven by scientific data is to advise our people to get vaccinated when there is a temporary lockdown. Isolation measures are also in place to restrict movement in the country.

Thank you.

Mr MICHAEL NALI (Mendi-Minister for Works and Implementation) – Thank you, Mr Speaker, I would like to give a short statement in this regard.

Our people, voted us in to Parliament. Some are professional leaders like Sir Puka Temu who is a doctor by profession and also the Minister for Fisheries, Dr Lino Tom, who just gave his statement.

Mr Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health for the hard work and time given to our country when we were faced by this pandemic in the world.

Mr Speaker, I would like to advice Parliament that I have been vaccinated because it must start from us. The Prime Minister was the first to get vaccinated and I have informed my family to receive the vaccination.

I was one of the first ones and I have the green card as proof. There have been so much said on social media with contradicting ideas and claiming to be experts in regard to this vaccine as if they are God. However, I would like to sound a warning that if you discourage vaccination and if someone dies because of your discouragement then one day you will be answerable to God.

Mr Speaker, we have all experts telling us that there is no other way to avoid this illness but to get vaccinated. You cannot rely on isolation because humans are social beings and most of our responsibilities require us to mingle with each other. Nobody knows when Covid-19 will cease to exist. What we know is that it is a pandemic that is here to stay.

We all know that there are side effects to all medications that we take. For example, when I was small, I did nurse a very big sore on my left arm after being vaccinated but it did heal. Our bodies will accept some drugs but reject others. Its just natural for our bodies to react in that way. I want to encourage you and Papua New Guinean's to go get the Covid-19 vaccination.

Mr Speaker, just last week, we lost a top Papua New Guinean engineer. He is the man behind the maintenance of the Highlands Highway. I wept because he is a very important man who we rely on. He died because of Covid-19.

I would also like to thank the Marape-Basil Government for allocating much needed funds to us in the districts. I did receive my DSIP and I have money in the account. Nothing is stopping me from using this money to save the lives of my people. I was in touch with my provincial health CEO and asked him if he needed my help as their mandated leader. I am a leader that buys medical equipment for my hospital. As I speak, my district CEO is depositing K2 million into a supplier's account to buy a CT scan for my people. It is my responsibility as the leader. It is my responsibility to give priority to what my people need.

Mr Speaker, I want to sound a warning to all of us that this pandemic will not go away until such time God decides otherwise. I worry about our people. We live in extended families and communal societies. It is very impossible to live away from each other even if it is two to three meters. We are always looking each other in the face when we converse.

27/02

Mr Speaker, all the salient points that we can debate and bring up have already been mentioned by the Minister for Fisheries who is the Member for Wabag, the Honourable Dr Lino Tom.

All the information that is required and that is needed to allay our fears have been said by someone with a medical background. People of Papua New Guinea, wherever you are, there are television sets. If you can watch me speaking, please, the only way to avoid getting this disease is by getting vaccinated.

We may advocate social distancing but Papua New Guineans do not know the meaning of social distancing. We live in clusters. The only way we can save our country is by vaccination.

Mr Speaker, I also wish to say on the Floor of Parliament that though the Government is here, we as leaders of this country have so many methods to settle this pandemic. Whatever ailments that may come, we have many different ways to combat them.

Mr Speaker, I must emphasise that we as a government must ensure that we come up with the best solutions, even if it means to expend finance, we must get advice from the professionals. Our professionals are our doctors. We must not give up on them. We must learn to heed their advice. Some of us may be smarter than them but we must listen to the team that will give us advice.

When it comes to spending money, we must listen to advice. The most important people who are now dealing with this virus are health workers. The doctors, nurses and medical workers on the frontline.

Currently at the Mendi Hospital, 14 medical personnel are down with Covid-19. Yesterday, I spoke with the CEO, who informed me that he is perplexed as to where he would hire nurses.

We have one national institution in the Southern Highlands, that is the Mendi School of Nursing and recently we added on the university. I think the hospital is getting support from inexperienced students from the school of nursing to maintain services.

I am talking about Mendi only but I think Port Moresby General Hospital is facing the same problem. This problem is common to Lae and Eastern Highlands as well.

I take my hat off to those who have taken up roles in the frontline, sacrificing their lives. These are not ordinary citizens. They have people in their villages such as their

mothers, fathers and others who rely on them but their personal sacrifices to save the lives of Papua New Guineans must be commended.

I pray that God will look after them, guide them and protect them in their endeavours to save lives. It is not easy. People of Papua New Guinea must firstly, get out there now and get vaccinated.

Secondly, the culture of gathering and chewing betel nut as well as playing dart and all such social activities must cease immediately. It is incumbent that our people must learn to listen because if our people do not listen, if any of you knowingly refuse to get vaccinated and move around freely to pass the virus on to others, you must have a guilty conscience. You must be guilty because you are a carrier.

Mr Speaker, because I got my vaccine already, I have a very high level of comfort. When I move around, I conform to the new normal. I wear my mask and use the hand sanitizer to wash my hands frequently. This is to ensure that I am adhering to doctor's prevention measures against Covid-19.

28/02

Mr Speaker, this is my mask made by Papua New Guinean women, I bought it from the market. Thank you, for installing the glass and I am not looking left or right while speaking. When I speak my saliva will travel less than one meter if I don't wear a mask. The bacteria will travel through my saliva. When I cough into my hands and if I do not wash them and shake hands with other people, I will transmit the disease.

Mr Speaker, I want to inform us all that even if we receive the vaccine, we must follow the protocols of Covid-19. For those of you who have not received the vaccine please go and get vaccinated because you do not know the strength of your immune system unless you are vaccinated, then you will be protected. That is what the doctors are advising me so I have followed their instructions.

Mr Speaker, to finish of my speech, some of the colleague members here please lead by example and go and get vaccinated now.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr PAIAS WINGTI (Western Highlands) – Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think the Minister for Health has made a good statement.

This is a time of crisis for the whole world and Papua New Guinea is no exception.

We are going to have to go through this. I want to say right from the beginning that leadership is required here. Leadership, is very important for Papua New Guinea because the actions of the leaders will determine what the society sees. If, the society see the actions of the leaders are contrary and leaders don't do the right thing, the society follows that.

Mr Speaker, but today is quite important because we have not debated about Covid-19, we've not talked about it seriously. We start talking about it right in the beginning but nobody took it serious six months ago.

I am now glad our Prime Minister has taken the lead as the elected leader of this country and he took the vaccine and that's something about leadership. He took the vaccination then followed by our bishops, all the church goers in Papua New Guinea, Cardinal Sir John Ribet, the second largest Church, the Lutheran church, Lutheran bishop in Lae, then some of our senior leaders here, Sir Julius Chan the founding father of this country, he took the vaccination, followed by the governor who are sitting here and the Chief Justice.

These are very important institutions headed by Papua New Guineans and we in this Parliament must lead by example.

29/02

Look at what is happening in America! When Covid-19 started in China that was because of the traffic flow between China and America, about 60 flights every day from New York to Europe. That was where the pandemic was at its worst, we watched it on TV, people were dying. We are a small country with nine million people, not one billion and we turn to repudiate scientific findings and research provided by medical experts. The confusion is sometimes caused by us. Who are we listening to? Today, we have learned doctors here, the Minister for fisheries and Sir Puka Temu here.

The first thing is for the leaders of this country to focus their ideas. You cannot keep on asking the Prime Minister for money because there is no money in this country. Money will not fix the problem; the problem will be fixed by mind change and attitude change and nothing else. Get the people and leaders to vaccinate. As the Governor, I have called all the councillors to come to the meeting and get vaccinated. I called student leaders to get vaccinated. That's why I am here in parliament. This is a serious mater. This country has social gatherings like hauskrai where Covid-19 transmission can spike and cause a lot of deaths. The Prime Minister cannot do anything, where will he get the money, you keep on asking him for money. You have to change the peoples' mindset. Tell them to stay in Giwing,

tell them to stay in Kabwum or in Telefomin. Tell them to stay in their locations and don't come to town. That is leadership, its not about everyday coming and asking for money. Our economy is not big. If we will keep on borrowing money, we will keep on putting more pressure on the government and we cannot do that. On this issue everybody has to be united, do not panic, give comfort to our people and advise them properly not to move around and go get vaccinated. The answer is vaccination. You have seen the statistics, those who were vaccinated who were admitted to the hospitals, they recovered but those who were not vaccinated died. It is happening globally. I am so emotional about this because I can see where our country is going. I can see people are dying in Goroka, Lae, Hagen and everywhere so unless the leaders change their mindset, stay together and give the right message. We must not give contradicting messages.

Our churches have already made their stance clear. The two big churches who were in this country are encouraging our citizens to be vaccinated and our role is the same. No amount of money can fix it. It is the attitude of the people and we must all be vaccinated. That is the only way we can minimize it. From what we heard today, 80 per cent of our people must be vaccinated to be safe. Fiji a small country with less population but has almost 80 per cent of its citizens vaccinated. What is wrong with this country?

30/02

Our vaccinations are the lowest in the world and we leaders are responsible for it. We must not mislead our people. The councillors, churches and other little groups should not go around telling lies.

Mr Speaker, I appeal to all of us. This is a crisis that we have never seen before and its right here at our fingertips. In a crisis, we must show leadership.

We are not like America or other world economies where people live in close families and capitalist societies. They are not socialists like us who live in villages, go to haus kraiss, attend funerals, and walk around together. We are so vulnerable. We cannot take this issue lightly. It is a major problem for us.

Mr Speaker, I want to appeal to all our leaders, our church and student leaders, please, don't go on Google. Don't go and mislead the people. You said it six months ago when the number of deaths were low. What happened today?

In Eastern Highlands there are 200 deaths, in Western Highlands there are more and in NCD and other parts of Papua New Guinea, the number is increasing.

We must not take this matter lightly. Mr Speaker, this is a serious matter that requires all of us to unite. There is no politics here. Nobody can use this to play politics against the government, no, on this matter, we have to unite together and make sure we address this problem and minimise it.

Otherwise, our work force will be affected. How many technicians and computer operators do we have in this country? What happens if many doctors die? What happens if many in the public service die? The system will collapse because you don't have the manpower like in America or Australia, where you can replace it.

This is a young country. It does not have that many people so, we have to be sensitive because we are sitting on a time bomb. Since we are sitting on a time bomb, leadership requires us to come together and make sure we take control over this. We did it for other decisions before. We can still do the same provided that the message is unified and not dividing or misleading people.

Mr Speaker, it is a serious issue and it requires leadership from all of us. My appeal to Members, please, I am asking you, I am older than many of you, let's come together. All of us must come together on this and make sure that we advise our people to get vaccinated. That's the only way to minimise it.

Deaths are emotional. Papua New Guineans are feeling very sorry. There are many mourning houses and there are gatherings but, in that process, we are killing more people. We have to tell our people to not go to the mourning houses. Get the number down. Don't go to big gatherings. These are hard and painful decisions but we have to tell them because we care. If we don't tell them, who will? We need to tell the people the right information.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr CHRIS HAIVETA (Gulf) – Thank you, Mr Speaker. I also stand to make a few remarks. I want to thank the Minister for Health for bringing this matter forward. This, I believe is the biggest worry this country has at the moment.

Mr Speaker, last year, after I got Covid-19, I stood up on this Floor here and I told all the honourable Members that Covid-19 is real. I got it and I survived and there is no cure for it. That was over six months ago.

We, as the collective leadership of this country, have not been responding. This is a pandemic. It has affected our economy and our lives and right now, as the rates go up, we've finally woken up.

31/02

Mr Speaker, I want to repeat what I've been saying in caucus meetings time and time again, including yesterday. We all have responsibilities as Open members. You all have your DDAs and you all have staff under your control. As ministers, you have your departmental heads, departments and statutory bodies under your control. As governors, we also have our provincial departments under our control. But have we shown the leadership?

I contracted Covid-19 but I also got vaccinated. Why? I will still get Covid-19 but I now have more immunity to protect myself. What have we done? Have you told the chairman of DDAs that you are vaccinated and that they must all get vaccinated? Have you told your ward members and councillors? As the former prime minister was saying, have you told them that they need to get vaccinated? Have you told your family members? And as governors, have you told your chairman - as I have done - that if you don't vaccinate, I will sack you.

I am making changes to my PEC, the assembly and the committees that don't listen to the national message that the Prime Minister, religious leaders and other leaders have clearly shown us by action. This is not the Prime Minister's problem alone; this is our problem. It is not only a problem for the Health Minister; it is for all of us. Vaccinate and Vaccinate! And let's have a strategy; there is no other way but the Niupla Pasin.

If you want to go to a hauskrai, forget it. Ask your relative for a bank account and make a deposit. He can look after the hauskrai; you don't need to go.

Mr Speaker, I fully support the comments by the Minister for Health. I have a provincial plan in place, but I want to sign the tripartite agreement.

Mr Minister, the provincial health authorities are not directly under the provinces; they are under you. You are responsible for provincial and national responses. I don't have - together with the other governors - direct control over the responses that you will provide. We can put our people there but the measures are under your control. Community health workers are under your control, doctors are under your control. We can only look after our provincial departments such as our people, the teachers and workers in the departments. But to do that, we need you to give us the vaccines. You need to give vaccines to each department and vaccinate all of us. Vaccinate! Vaccinate! Vaccinate!

Mr Speaker, there is no alternative. I fully support the Minister for Health, Sir Puka, Minister Nali and our senior, Paias Wingti.

I once again repeat; Vaccinate! Vaccination is the only answer.

Mr SPEAKER – Honourable Members, this is a very important issue that the country is facing, and I can see that many Members are eager to contribute to the debate, therefore, the Chair will allow the opportunity for each of you, but bear with me as I call on certain Members. Thank you.

32/02

Mr DON POLYE (Kandep) - Thankyou Mr Speaker, some insinuation has been raised in this debate on vaccination for Covid-19 and Delta variant. I want to make it clear here that I was one of the leaders who has raised some of the points on this Floor of Parliament on how the Government will address this Covid-19 Pandemic or any other notations of that virus into the future.

Mr Speaker, I have scientific evidence to prove that and, in my debate, I mentioned that this sickness will evolve in the future and we will see mutations of this virus into different forms. Therefore, science and the medical industry in the world must prove to us that they will address this issue. I for one strongly want to emphasize on these two points.

Firstly, I agree with the vaccination and I support the statement made by the Minister, the approach taken by the Prime Minister, the points mentioned by the Member for Wabag who is also a medical doctor by profession, the points mentioned by the Governor for Western Highlands Province, the Governor for Gulf and the Minister for Works and other Members that debated on this issue.

Mr Speaker, I have spoken on this issue. I am one of these people, during my childhood days, did get vaccinated against polio. I am a pro-vaccination person and I also support the vaccination on Covid-19 and the Delta variant, whilst supporting it in-depth aspects of it within the human body.

When talking about vaccination we must not overlook the most important component of man, the national immunity and its scientific facts. we cannot deny this. We must consider both of them by practicing healthy living. This is very important for the human body such as positive thinking, proper dieting, sleeping at the right time and physical fitness (daily exercise) and keeping ourselves free from obesity. These are some of the life style diseases like diabetes or other illness that comes to us because we enjoy the modern luxury life. This makes us vulnerable to any ongoing diseases like Covid-19 or even Delta variant.

For instances, Covid-19 has been around for almost three years and now we are faced with another virus Delta variant and not long, and we will talk about other virus maybe mega variant, will evolved forever. And now they are introducing Johnson and Johnson, AstraZeneca and other vaccines.

It seems that every virus comes with different vaccination and it will never stop. And that's why I am debating on these aspects because this virus changes form.

33/02

I am debating on the mutation of the virus that is changing its form and shape every now and then. The Immune System in our body is the most powerful defence to stand against all these virus attacks. We cannot continue to keep eating junk food, eat unhealthily, grow pot-bellies, live in obesity, and live in the luxury of this modern life and we keep preaching to get vaccinated. We have to see it at the angle of trying to develop and strengthen our Immune System in our bodies.

We have to continue to fund the HIV-AIDS program too because people living with HIV are the most vulnerable to this surging Delta variant. If Papua New Guineans have underlying health issues now, it will be easy for Papua New Guinea to be wiped out.

There isn't any study or current research to base on, that a healthy person has succumbed to Covid- 19. Please give us some statistics on how many diabetic patients, TB, pneumonia or asthma patients have succumbed to Covid- 19 so that these statistics can be made public to our people of this country and they can have some knowledge. When the whole global cry is just about vaccination there is no proper information to support the basis of this global outcry.

Mr Speaker, we must support vaccination but with a proper calculative assessment. It is time we must stand up and promote healthy living in this country. We must now forsake bettlenut, smoking, drugs, the laziness of not exercising, and eating too much and growing fat, we have to emphasis against these lifestyles like we are now emphasising vaccination.

If we carry out a study now and the categories of people with these underlying issues with their age groups, there will be some form of facts that will inform our people to choose properly in life.

I am Don Polye the representative of the Kandep people, I am not advocating against vaccination, but please read my statements clearly. I am simply saying yes, you vaccinate but at the same time you address those other lifestyle issues. The current trend this country and

our people's own lifestyle is causing an uprise in lifestyle disease and we are growing an unhealthy population.

We are feeding our people with lamb flaps, flour sausages, unhealthy foods and here at the State Function room in Parliament. We are eating all these greasy foods and it is contributing to stress. If you look at what I write in the social media, I am not saying any bad thing here. We need to analyse and make some calculative decisions.

Mr Speaker, one other point is that we must have some form of study on our immune system. You have to be clear with information and I am saying you should compare the strength of the vaccination against the immunity of the body. Who is responsible for carrying out that study? We try and give the Johnson and Johnson vaccine to one of our local villagers and we measure their immunity with that vaccine.

I call on doctors and scientists to carry out that study. Why I say this is because look around you, those retarded individuals on the street are literally eating from garbage bins. But they don't die immediately, but an average Papua New Guinean here is told that if you don't wash your hands you will contract this virus? What is that? There must be some explanation to this. People in the rural areas of Papua New Guinea have a much stronger immune system and that I can state boldly.

34/02

Dr Lino Tom – Point of Order! The Member for Kandep has made some very good points but I think he has misled Parliament.

Mr Speaker, immunity is specific. This is a major character of immunity. Innate immunity is a general immunity that is found in parts of our body like the skin. The skin is part of our defence mechanisms to prevent things like infections. However, these general immunities, although do prevent sickness, it is not specific. Immunity needs to be specific, therefore for Covid-19, there is no other way to develop immunity. It is either through active infection which there is no guarantee that you will live, and through vaccination.

Mr Speaker, like I mentioned earlier, one outstanding feature of any immune system is specificity. I am only correcting what he has mentioned because he cannot make the general assumption that we already have immunity. The body will still develop immunity either through active infection or through vaccination. These are the only two-path ways to being immune.

Mr DON POLYE – The immunity of our bodies is a common-sense issue. We do not need to become a doctor to know the details. I believe that our body has its own immune systems. In other words, it has the ability to fight diseases.

(Members interjecting)

Mr SPEAKER – Order! Order! Let him finish his debate. The Chair will still give time and allow others to debate.

Mr DON POLYE – I am saying that our bodies have the natural ability to fight against diseases. This is not wrong; it is something true. Our bodies have the natural ability to fight against any form of disease. Whilst I support vaccination, can we carry out studies with the vaccination in our rural areas.

While we support the vaccination, we should be supporting other programs to deal with other health problems. We must realise that Covid-19 is here to stay therefore we need to address every other health issues including Covid-19. Why are we still advised to wear masks and wash our hands after being vaccinated? This only goes to mean that we still run the risk of being infected. This is why I argue that we need to address undercurrent health issues in the country and at the same time the Covid-19 vaccination. It is also an opportunity to address issues like health infrastructure, beddings, our oxygen supply and other issues that we face in a wholistic manner.

Finally, in Kandep, we are taking a proactive approach in addressing Covid-19. I have established a mobile clinic to test all Kandep people for Covid-19. If we find a positive case then we give vaccines and educate them. We are just dealing with the people in the urban areas but the rural people are yet to be tested.

35/02

Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the call from the other leaders that we go down to the people and educate them about Covid-19 and also raise other issues that we must at the same time address.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr ALLAN BIRD (East Sepik) – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to debate.

Thank you, to the Minister for Health and before I speak on the issue, I would like to recognise the hard work that our medical workers are putting in to address this pandemic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, our health system, and in fact many of the health systems in the world are not designed to handle pandemics. When a hospital system is designed it is designed in a way that it can cater for regular illnesses. When something occurs and it is greater than what you planned for then that is when you have a crisis.

I would like to endorse what the Minister for Fisheries, Dr Lino Tom and Governor of Western Highlands have mentioned. This is a serious crisis but we Papua New Guineans have taken it lightly.

Today, we are talking about vaccination like it is something new to us. I am reading this from our PNG Health Immunization Protocol, “When a child is born, he is immunized with BCG Vaccination”. Therefore, all of us here have received BCG injection at birth to help us fight tuberculosis.

Today, we are debating why people are getting vaccinated and some are dying but we all got the BCG vaccine at birth and people still dying from tuberculosis. Is it wrong that we are allowing this vaccination? No, it is actually saving a lot of lives. We have all received a Hepatitis B vaccine and Polio vaccine.

Mr Deputy Speaker, two years ago when we were vaccinating for Polio in my province the pastors were stopping us and they even went to the extent of hitting the health workers because they said that we were giving the children 666.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we have the distinctions and Papua New Guinea is winning all the gold medals for the lowest rate of vaccinations in the world. How did this happen?

Yesterday, I corrected the Opposition Leader and I want to endorse what the Governor of Eastern Highlands mentioned. When Parliament is in session the media is sending out live telecasts and reporting what the Members are saying so if we say something that is false our people will assume that it is true because it came from their leaders. We are careless in our use of data and we cannot do this. We have to be careful when we want to say something on this Floor because our carelessness results in the lack of trust out there in the community. It all begins here. The first act we must have here as leaders is to check our facts before we open our mouths and if you are unsure then don't talk about it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to give another example in my province. We must have the highest rate of stabbing in the country.

36/02

My province probably has the highest rate of skin cuttings in the country. The young Sepik males feel that their skin is iron and get bush knives to cut themselves. They invent wire catapults and shoot themselves with darts and that's normal.

I try to talk to my people to minimize that practice because I have only two surgeons in my province. The surgeons are human beings and not like sewing machines where you press a button to sew. One surgeon can probably do four surgeries in an eight-hour period and if 20 patients end up in Boram Hospital and need a doctor for surgery some of them have to wait for the next day because the doctor is not a machine and can't work for 24 hours.

Mr Speaker, what all of us must understand here - and it's a fact and I know this because I was a former hospital board chairman for five years and I know the difficulties that our health workers face. If you want to build a hospital, it will take you six years so let's not come here on this Floor and talk about things that are impractical. If we start building hospitals now many people will die by the time it is completed.

And I think about what Honourable Sir Puka Temu said this morning about needs of the Central people and the hospital they need. They needed that hospital 10 years ago, if we start building now it may not even help them with Covid-19; they need help now. So, we must consider the capacity of our health workers to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. They can only do so much; they are human beings; they are not machines.

Our people out there are against the vaccination saying, believing that it is about 666, Bill Gates, magnets and et cetera, and we have to call them out; that is false information. If they think that they can boil 'daka' (mustard) leaves and different types of vegetable to cure Covid-19 then perhaps let's invite them to Port Moresby General Hospital to handle the patients and they will see.

Our country and people are at risk and we have to manage the risks. Risk is not going to respect us either because I am in government and you are in opposition and that we are always fighting. No! We must come out here and speak about the facts.

When I first spoke on this Floor on the issue of Covid-19, I called for an evolving strategy. We know that it is a new disease and the bacteria mutates as some of you already

outlined. Well we have to be prepared to change our strategy too. What was the first thing we did? We locked down the country because we were still trying to understand our enemy.

When we saw that lockdown was in-effective, we found another way. Nobody was worried about the vaccine last year. Not even one person said Covid-19 vaccine will make you magnetic. No one said it was 666 or that Bill Gates wanted to kill all black people. Until the vaccine got developed early this year, suddenly all the believers of witchcraft in Papua New Guinea came out and said; no, it's 666.

Mr Speaker, there was no Covid-19 vaccine last year and now that we have a vaccine, we are looking for all sorts of reasons as to why we should not use it.

Mr Speaker, as I sit here, 3.5 billion human beings in this world have received the vaccine. Our population is 9 million and only 200,000 have been vaccinated. What is the risk we face? Dr Lino has succinctly spelt that out to us.

This disease will go after all human beings who are breathing and alive on this planet Earth; they are going to catch it.

37/02

This pandemic will affect every living being on this planet, even if you think you can overcome it using your supernatural powers because the fact stands that everybody who died because of Covi-19 in my province were not vaccinated. There are people who need serious help and are on oxygen tanks, they are all not vaccinated. Those are the facts. I know they are not making it up. I receive daily reports from Doctor Lina and all the hard-working staff there.

Some of you in government will recall, earlier when the vaccine arrived, I argued with the Health Minister, I wanted the vaccine for my province. This was based on the advice of the late Mark Maludu, the best CEO of a PHA in Papua New Guinea. I lost him because I could not get the vaccine in time. He advised me to go past Government protocols to bring in the vaccine and save the people of Sepik. You have all seen the *Whatsapp* messages, I argued with the Health Minister. I actually threatened to call for the sacking of the Health Secretary because of the of the delays in the vaccine. I lost Mark Maludu, the man who told me to do that.

I am not a health expert, my back ground is in strategy. I listen to the experts like Doctor Lino. If you are not a Doctor here, you should be listening to Dr Puka Temu and

Doctor Tom Lino, if you won't listen to your own doctors in your provinces. I have a team of really fine Sepik doctors in East Sepik who advise me on Covid-19 and I listen to them.

Some of you whose provinces and districts are currently suffering from the pandemic are anti-vaccine. Maybe we should tell your people who you are. You should take responsibility. These people are dying because you oppose the availability of the vaccine to your own people. This is the sort of nonsense we should stop in this House. Take some leadership, it not time to be afraid. People are dying and more people are going to die if we do not vaccinate. We received at least 12 vaccinations throughout our life, we are now stopping some of our children from getting vaccination. Maybe if we did not have access to social media, some of our people would already have been vaccinated.

The doctors in my province say that many will die from Covi-19 because we act like we know it all. Leaders, it is not time to argue over petty issues. How many lives will be lost before we take it seriously? I know of 12 close friends of mine who died this year from Covid-19. I mourned with their family and now they have become just statistics, but to me they are real people with real families.

If anyone has worked in the health sector and has a better solution, let's hear it, if somebody in Papua New Guinea knows the Covid-19 cure please show us, so we can invest in it and even sell it. But if you don't have the solution please keep quiet.

Mr Speaker, I was vaccinated in public, inside Wewak market because the Sepik's are like Thomas from the Bible. They will believe after they see it. As I address my people, I want to tell them to see what is happening in the Highland's. Four per cent of the Sepik population is vaccinated, Mr Speaker that's three per cent higher than the PNG average so I commend my people.

38/02

However, I still have highly-educated Sepiks who believe this nonsense about 666, Bill Gates and the effects on magnets. I don't know where this is coming from. Why are we so important that Bill Gates wants to kill all of us? I don't understand that logic.

We have two priorities and this House must show some leadership in dealing with. Firstly, we have to save our Health system from collapsing. If 200 people with Covid-19 turn up at Port Moresby General Hospital, it will collapse just like what we saw at the Goroka Hospital. When people started turning up in large numbers, the hospital collapsed. A doctor cannot work 24 hours a day. A nurse cannot work 24 hours a day. Our system is not

designed to handle a pandemic. In fact, we have neglected it for 40 years, so let's not expect miracles in the next four months. Let's be practical.

In Sepik, we have advised the sick to remain at home and not go to the hospitals. I have been telling them that for the last 12 months. I spoke to my people again via radio service last week before I left. Once Covid-19 starts clogging up the hospital system, people will start dying from everything else. That's the danger we face and we are already seeing this in Goroka. How many more provinces have to be affected before we show some leadership?

Mr Speaker, the second priority is saving our economy. How do we do this? The answer is very simple. The answer is already accepted by the rest of the planet. It is only Papua New Guineans who refuse to accept that answer. The world has decided to vaccinate and we are questioning their judgement because we think we know more. We think we are the smartest, brilliant people that God ever blessed the planet with. We don't trust the scientists in America, India or China. No, we trust our bush doctor who is boiling guava and 'daka'(mustard) leaves which is mixed with lime powder and is given to you to heal you. That is not leadership. The word for that is stupidity.

We have heard from our seniors, Dr Temu and Dr Lino, and there are other learned doctors who are right now, while we are sitting here debating, looking after patients. They are not having breakfast or lunch, or going out and drinking tea like some of us. They have been sacrificing on the frontline these last how many days while we procrastinate.

We should take pictures of ourselves getting vaccinated and tell our people that we are showing leadership, and that we are standing behind our Prime Minister who showed leadership. He was the first person in the country to take the vaccine. I commend you, Mr Prime Minister, for your leadership. Now I look to the rest of you my colleagues – show some leadership!

Let's help our people make that decision. I am fully vaccinated and so is my entire family. I am encouraging all my friends and everybody in East Sepik.

Dr Lino has explained to us that there are two ways to stop this virus. The first is by catching the virus and if somehow you recover, you will be immune. The second way is by taking the vaccine. You now have to weigh out which way is the best. Do you want to gamble with your life? I prefer the safe option that 3.5 billion people on this planet have taken; vaccination.

I urge the people of Papua New Guinea who are watching to make the decision and weigh out the risks. Do you want to gamble with your life or join 3.5 billion people and take the vaccine?

39/02

We are not stopping you from eating healthy and washing your hands. We are not stopping you from any of that. On top of that, if you are in a fight for your life; if you have to survive and when they give you a gun called the vaccine, will you take the gun with you or leave it home? I would rather take my protection with me.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr ELIAS KAPAVORE (Pomio) – Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to also thank the Minister for responding to the questions which I have raised yesterday. I think it was because of some of those questions that we are able to debate those issues today.

Mr Speaker, it is not about political grandstanding and other things, it is to do with strategizing facts so that our people are fully informed of what important decisions they can make for their lives. That is basically important.

Firstly, the comment made by the Governor of Gulf today, saying that PHA's do not report to them. *PHA Act* very clearly states that, PHA's must report to the governors and the ministers. If the structure is not clear, we need to straighten this because during the PHA declaration, the Minister signs an agreement with the PHA and the Governor signs off. This makes them accountable and responsible for the health services in the respective provinces.

Secondly, I would like to stress on establishing good working relationship with the PHA's. At the moment they need to have staff movement and addressing issues with regard to Covid-19 is important now. It has become more critical and we need to have that movement of staff.

I keep saying this again that the PHA regulation, *section 56*, mentions the staff arrangement. They need to have staff moving around, for example; the staff are not only based at Gerehu Hospital, but have them move around to other health facilities within the PHA environment. They can also move to church health facilities if there is a need.

These are all important, Mr Speaker. Everything that we will do will reflect back to policy. And one of the policy requirements that we need to have in place now is the regulation, *section 56*, as I have mentioned several times already. I believe the Health

Minister and his team are working on it and if they can push for it, they can establish pathway for the staffs to move to other health facilities in the country.

Thirdly, those who got vaccinated and are still living in an environment that is unhygienic, this can still propagate the spread of Covid-19. Many more will still be affected. The comment made today by our two leaders from Eastern Highlands Province regarding the water supply situation in Eastern Highlands is also very important to other provinces.

The Government of today must put in place some resources and look at some of these areas where we can fix the issue of water supply. This will help people to get access to clean and healthy water where our people are happy.

These are some of the few things I wanted to speak on today; it comes back to policy and making sure that we live safely together in our country. We support the vaccination program that is going on and I thank the Minister for giving us some important facts. Our people are now put in the right direction to actually make their decision. I believe the vaccine is the way forward for our people of Papua New Guinea.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr PILA NININGI (Imbonggu – Minister for Inter-Government Relations) – Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I was one of those ministers, diagnosed with Covid-19. Through my experience, Covid-19 is not a virus that we must joke about. I was supposed to lose my life, but it is by the grace of God I am still living.

40/02

I want to sincerely share my heartfelt gratitude to my family and the people who stood with me praying for me to recover.

Covid-19 must be explained in simple terms to our rural population. It is when mucus arrests the heart and suffocates the respiratory system. If there is no oxygen support and you are struggling to breathe that is a sign that you will die.

I want to thank the staff and management from the Port Moresby General Hospital for saving my life so that today I can continue to serve my people of Imbonggu and the rest of Papua New Guinea.

Private hospitals are very expensive and my advice to the people of this country and the Members of Parliament is that your hospitals are the best facilities. Money-oriented facilities will not assure 100 percent services.

When I was diagnosed the medical staff at Port Moresby General Hospital tried their best to remove the thick mucus that was blocking my respiratory system but to no avail, until my sister brought Vicks vapour rub ointment. I applied a bit in a mug and filled it up with hot water and covered myself with a blanket and I started inhaling and exhaling in the mug. The mucus cleared and the doctors were surprised. I filled two more mugs and gave them to use to inhale. If this treatment saved my life, it can surely save anybody's life too. This sickness is controllable and we can eliminate it by steaming. That is my personal experience.

I was saddened because at that time we lost our Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare. He was more than a good friend to me and I never attended his State Funeral. It saddened me because his last official visit was in my district in Imbonggu and after that he succumbed to his illness.

I want to say that the vaccine that is being talked about is real it can actually do what it is said to do. There was an emergency DDA in my district and we committed close to K300,000 because of lack of oxygen bottles. If there are no gas bottles for oxygen then we must do everything possible to bring in the much needed and necessary equipment.

41/02

If it means that we charter planes to bring in this equipment then we must do so. It's really a situation where we can't ignore and avoid. We must debate and come up with ideas to address it. With that I thank those people who advocated aggressively for all of us to be vaccinated. I thank the Prime Minister for taking a bold stand in leading the country with vaccination and thank the good Lord for giving wisdom, knowledge and direction to vaccinate. Some of us got vaccinated because it will protect us.

With these remarks, this small item costs only K25 and it's not for consumption but to give you oxygen. I have tried it on some people and it worked and I know it will do the same to you. That's one aspect of it and the other way is to live a healthy life such as dieting; don't eat protein every day just limit to eating greens because it will boost your body system to fight any kind of illness.

Secondly, take part in physical exercise, I have a treadmill at home and I exercise most times because it's important for my health. Therefore, I encourage all Members of Parliament

to get treadmills for physical exercise and don't try to gain weight. These two components work hand in hand, you eat and exercise and it will boost your body system to fight diseases.

Some of these ideas must be taken seriously and followed. But importantly, we all must be vaccinated. I thank the Minister for Health, though it's not your profession, but you have carried out the duties and responsibilities well for this country and I commend you for that. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr PETER NUMU (Eastern Highlands) – Thank you Mr Speaker, I take this time to thank the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health. On behalf of my people and my Government, I say thank you for considering my long battle regarding my request for the chairman of PHA to take the lead in carrying out the duties and responsibilities for the Department of Health in the Province. I thank the Prime Minister for appointing a chairman for the province which was then held by the late Malcolm Kela Smith.

Mr Speaker, we have debated a lot on vaccination and it's like bad gas filling up the stomach. Sometimes we talk about how we can move this vaccine because it's not an easy task. We have societal problems and the government system does have problems. We are congregating here talking about the vaccine but our people back in province think it is something new. I am sure a lot of negative comments will arise.

The other issue is, some of us leaders, our DDAs don't cooperate with our provincial administrators and there is no coordination. We must discuss how DDAs, provincial administrator and the health facilities are at this very time. The ward councilors and LLG presidents must also help organize to move the vaccines to villages.

42/02

Many of our villages are strong believers in Christianity so whether they accept these ideas or not is another question. As leaders we will lead but whether they accept it or not is another issue. We therefore need to strategize as to how we are going to rollout this vaccination programs.

Mr Speaker, my province has been hard hit and many people have died and the situation is worse. We are faced with two things; either we go into isolation or vaccinate people or apply both. With vaccination, it seems to be too late as people are still dying. I hear that people are even dying in Western Highlands to Southern Highlands. This requires a

greater call for this Government and we the leaders of this country. We need to decide quickly as to what approach is effective and efficient to cure the spread of Covid-19.

Mr Speaker, in Eastern Highlands, we are now talking about an intra-provincial lockdown where we stop the movement of people in all districts. This is because with the movement of people the virus moves too. If we allow movement then we are going to add more burden to our hospitals. We will run into a shortage of health personnel and the supply of medical kits to treat patients. This is why we are strongly considering a stop in the movement of people in our districts.

Mr Speaker, in addition, we as a Government need to work with all our governors and our district authorities. Our pressing issues are more to do with how we treat our infected people and how we deal with the logistics to fight the virus.

We must also consider our front liners like our health personnel and our police personnel. For example, policemen are asking if there is insurance as cover for them to conduct their duties. They are afraid to be infected if they approach people who disobey the *Nuipia Pasin* measures. I already have two police personnel who have passed away whilst carrying-out their duties.

Mr Speaker, in my province, we have 24 LLG presidents and they have a lot of influence over their people. We need to use these leaders to carry out awareness to the people. The people will listen to them. They will convince the people enough to be vaccinated. Our people will absorb, accept and come forward to be vaccinated. If we want to carry out this as mandated leaders then I am sure that we are going to face a hard time. The more we challenge them, the more they will refuse and people will die.

We must also utilise our churches including our pastors and priests. They must also take part in helping convince our people to be vaccinated. These are real challenges that we face. We must give them facts and figures to support our campaign in order to drive the message into our people. If we can influence our people through these methods then this will be defined as leadership. We cannot sit in Parliament and just talk because that is not leadership. We need to go into our communities and be part of them and educate them about Covid-19. We need to lead them by example thereby winning them over to our side in order for them to be vaccinated.

Mr Speaker, we have always been a communal society of people and separating people will be very hard. This is a fact that we should understand when dealing with our people. If

we decide for a lock down then we must enforce it by all means possible. We must also consider moral implications when our police set up road blocks.

43/02

In the province we have set up two road blocks. Those travelling from Morobe and Madang have been turned back because I want to protect my people as we have already been given the red flag that our province is contaminated with Covid-19.

So, we have imposed inter-provincial lockdown measures to slow down or contain the spread of Covid-19. The two provincial road blocks are at Kassam Pass and Daulo Pass and there are smaller road blocks in the districts to stop the movement of people.

Mr Speaker, we have strategized to roll out the vaccines. On Monday, the provincial administrator presented 16 new vehicles which were bought for the LLG presidents. These vehicles will help transport the councillors to carry out awareness about the vaccine.

We are working closely with the Provincial Health Authority to supply the information so that the councillors will carry out awareness and convince the people; so when we set up the vaccine station, we will be able to see a good turnout. We need to inform our people at their level otherwise we will just be talking and people will not understand why we are doing all these things.

Mr Speaker, many of us have been debating on the most suitable available option to address this virus, which is getting vaccinated. We are part of the global trail for rolling out the vaccine. The Minister for Inter-Government Relations just showed us the Vicks container and said that helped him to recover from Covid-19; but there are some known medicines that have been around for many years and one is Ivermectin which is used to treat parasitic and viral infections.

I was Covid-19 positive and I went into self-isolated and was in quarantine for three months. Now, with this recent outbreak of Delta Variant, I felt some similar symptoms so I got tested but it turned out negative. I took the Ivermectin when I experienced these symptoms and felt better. I stopped coughing and the joint aches I experienced all went away. Maybe some doctors are administering this to their patients. I am a recipient and I think it worked for me. Yesterday, my child was sick and after I administered that medicine to him, he felt much better.

The WHO has stopped us from using this medicine. So can our scientist and doctors do a research into it to prove if it is suitable to treat Covid-19. I think that Ivermectin could be a

possible cure for this virus. It is on the list of WHO and has proven to have the least side effects, not many people have died after taking it, compared to other drugs. Can we test this or should we just wait for other countries to come and tell us what to do and what medication to take. This is a Sovereign Nation and we have scientists and doctors. There seems to be an increasing number of Covid-19 cases in New Ireland as well because there has been a big roll out of Ivermectin over there.

44/02

Let us not allow other people to come to our sovereign nation and tell us what to do. Let us not underestimate our doctors and scientists. We can not depend on the vaccine alone but let us consider other options as well.

We are trying to roll out the vaccine and if some other country comes in with money to assist please respect the government and people. Whatever assistance given should be put through the Health Department for roll out.

These are my few remarks. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr KERENGA KUA (Sinasina-Yonggamugl – Minister for Petroleum) – Thank you, Mr Speaker. Many good debates have been made following the ministerial statement by the Minister for Health and a good commentary made by Dr Lino Tom Minister for Fisheries highlighting many important points for us to adhere to.

I want to support that for both sides with six points just to assist us more forward;

(1) Many people were confused of whether they will get vaccinated or not but now with the second wave, they are well prepared to receive the vaccine. So, we need to concentrate on the vaccine supply and procedures that will be established to roll out the vaccination down to the ward level. For example, people are willing to receive the vaccine but supply is insufficient and from reporters I received from Chimbu Health Authority this morning, they received 6500 units. They have allocated only 300 units for my district and 50 units were distributed to each LLG. As a matter of fact, only 300 people out of 60,000 population will receive vaccination by the end of this week.

Mr Speaker, this highlights that we need to increase the supply of vaccination.

We must have a good roll out plan starting from the national, provincial, district, LLG and further down to the ward level. So, we must have a cascading plan starting from

provinces and going further down to each LLG. The Health Department must have this plan and roll it out through the provincial health authority.

We need a good detailed plan that goes right down to each ward council throughout Papua New Guinea including Bougainville. That's what we need now.

The other thing we need now is the oxygen. The necessary equipment to supply oxygen when the case is going out of hand. We must have it stationed at all health centers in each LLG, we must plan it now.

I am glad to hear that Prime Minister said they will not allocate funds to the district or province and that all funds available will be channeled to the Health Department to come up with one standardized plan for the whole country. That's a very good approach. That way, we will have one standardized plan to roll out uniformly right throughout our country.

So, I want to ask Health Minister, when this plan is executed, plan it right down to the ward level.

45/02

(2) Not long ago we passed the *Covid-19 Pandemic Act*. When the Bill was circulated, there was a section listing the powers delegated to the Controller. However, I have not sighted anything on how the Controller will manage a Haus Krai.

At the time when the Bill was circulated, mentioned that Haus Krai is a very important customary and social activity in Papua New Guinea. So, we must clearly give some statutory powers to the Controller to control haus kraisi in the country. In that way, we will have some control, because people get emotional and are driven by the crowd. Unfortunately, due to limited time, my proposal on giving specific powers to the Controller on the draft bill to manage Haus krai, did not get incorporated.

Today, people are dying by going to a Covid-19 victim Haus krai. In my Department, three people died within 30 days. The latest is this week, when we lost our Deputy Secretary. The Deputy Secretary died of Covid-19. He collapsed and died here because of bringing a colleague's body over to Alotau and contracted the virus in the process. This has happened in my Department and I am here talking about it.

We have a lot of important people dying right across the country today. In my district we have so many on the waiting list for us to observe protocols and I am confused, because what kind of protocols are, we going to observe.

This morning, I have sent a message to the Chimbu Provincial Health Authority Forum, requesting them to devise some protocols on how we can manage customary obligations during Haus krai while at the same time maintain the hygiene requirements of the Health Department. I asked the Chimbu Provincial Health Authority to give some advice to the Covid-19 Control Unit of Chimbu to devise some protocols. I think that matter should now be taken up by the Health Department and the Health Minister should be aware of this.

Develop some haus krai protocols. We cannot live it to every LLG to take their own approach. We need one standardized approach in managing haus kraids based on scientific knowledge, in order to minimise this issue of people contracting Covid-19 from attending Haus kraids of Covid-19 victims.

(3) Our economy today is really bad and it is affected by Covid-19. We need to work towards reactivating our economy. After listening to all these things and watching it happen, I have realised that only through vaccination, we will reopen our economy.

Few days ago, I came back from America and their borders were open because most of their population were vaccinated. So, when we entered their country, we got accessed because of the vaccination cards that we showed them. Singapore, Australia and other nations will open up their borders when they reach their level of vaccination limit in their country. We Papua New Guineans from the top level down to the lower level will only enter those borders through vaccination cards.

For our economy to open up, every citizen of this country must be vaccinated otherwise, every other part of the world will open up their borders, trade and movement of people will proceed while Papua New Guinea will be locked out because we refuse to believe in the vaccination.

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Trade and movement of people will take off and Papua New Guinea will be locked out because we refuse to believe in the vaccination. We are believing strangely. We use to listen and follow but now we don't want to listen and follow. Why?

My Speaker, I think it's the social media. There are too many unqualified commentators who are talking and people tend to believe them, instead of listening to qualified doctors and scientists who have that knowledge.

I think this has to stop. It is about time we start listening to the Government, meaning both Opposition and Government of the day because it is the only authority that has the right to speak for the people.

As mandated leaders, through our authorised institutions like the health department and police, our people must get good information from these departments.

My fourth point is regarding a demonstration in Lae regarding two companies when they announced, no jab no job. I also read about the article on the dailies on NCD stance on this same issue. Majority of workers got jabbed but its only a small percentage that needs to be jabbed.

There is a public protest right now as we are talking over there at the city council. They are saying human rights and this measure is impinging on private rights. That may be true but at the same time we must recognise that the companies or statutory authorities are all peasants. In the eyes of the law they are peasants and have the same right as all other individuals in this country.

By refusing to be vaccinated there is a creation of confrontation between the company as employer and the rights of our individual workers.

Whose right is more important than the other? I think now is the moment where we should accommodate other people's wellbeing than our own right.

Now is not the time for individual rights. Your focus should be more about the people around you, your brother, sister and children and colleagues who are daily near you.

If an employee is bragging on about his personal, private and human rights but he is not vaccinated, he is endangering the lives of everyone around him in the same company or department. He is infected and goes to work based on his misconceived belief and infects his colleagues or clients who come in for consultation, he is responsible for causing that infection.

The law is statutory and it states that we must look after our health and hygiene and occupational safety and the companies or departments must implement all those measures of the law. All the companies or departments have the right to insist on health application implanting rules in the workplaces.

This Government must stand behind those companies and departments because the law compels them to apply those laws and now is the time.

Yes, we must respect individual rights but now is the time where communal rights and the collective rights of everybody in our societies must be respected. I say this because individual rights and exercises will have a greater impact upon everybody else.

We have to put aside this debate about individual rights but encourage us to respect the right of everybody in the society.

The Government must stand behind all these companies and departments and implement that you don't get jabbed than no job, simple.

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Otherwise, it is gross misconduct on the part of the employee by endangering the safety of other employees and that of the visitors coming into the premises, gross misconduct liable to summary dismissal and that's the law and we must insist upon it. Don't listen to the cries of individuals who come up with misguided ideas about private rights.

My other debate is on our frontline warriors like doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers and all the employees of the hospitals. Minister for Health, if they weren't there than all our plans won't work out but face chaos. That's why I think that you must have a clear protection plan with equipment and resources for all the health workers who are dealing with Covid-19 in this country.

They are human beings and they have husbands, wives, children, families, tribes and villages working there and they need to be protected. So all the frontline workers have a clear-cut plan that is clearly published and we all must know because our family members are working in there as well. We have to protect them because they are at the frontline. In the Defence Force what do we call them infantry troops, the Opposition Leader would know. The frontline workers are exposed to the fire or danger so they must be protected.

Therefore, I want the Minister to prepare a clear-cut plan for Cabinet's approval for our frontline workers. They must be properly equipped, defended and protected.

My final point is in relation to Police and I want the Minister to take note. You would notice that each province has different approach to quarantining their province. I want us to have a centralized and standardised approach so that every province must apply the same rules. When citizens are moving from one province to another province, they should go through the same checklist instead of going through different checklist in every border. Its really causing confusion and inconvenience for the travelling public. That's why at every border post along the road, the controller must develop a standardised checklist so that when

you pass at one point you pass through every other point as well which will minimise inconvenience for our people. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA (Vanimo-Green –Leader of Opposition) - Thank you, Mr Speaker, I also want to contribute to this debate this afternoon. I am happy to hear many speakers advocating vaccination. When Covid-19 first started in 2019 I mentioned many times on this Floor of Parliament to lockdown all our borders in the country. I mentioned about the two border provinces to be properly manned. I mentioned also on planes entering our country to be properly checked and enforce strict rules for them to follow. We have seen it ourselves that many planes come to our country, even some private jets come in without following proper rules and conduct their businesses here and get on their jets and fly back. When Delta variant first hit hard in India a charter flight from there landed in the country. We didn't bother to quarantine all these passengers on board this flight.

Here we are calling names at each other and moving here and there on this Floor of Parliament. Now we are reacting because many people are dying in our country, especially in Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands, Simbu and so forth. How did the Delta variant pass through Vanimo and Western Province and hit hard Eastern Highlands and Western Highlands Provinces?

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Mr Speaker, our problem is that we are not properly prepared for this pandemic. I correct the Governor of East Sepik that when I speak of the Covid-19 money I meant well. We borrowed K6.7 billion in the name of the corona virus because of the pandemic in this country but to date no audit has been provided on the Floor of Parliament.

The Treasurer's report, talks about funding of corona virus of K501 million. That is how we treat corona virus in this country. We are not taking it seriously and now we are jumping around in Parliament. If we were serious, we would have fixed the hospitals in our country. We would have brought in more beds and prepared the wards. In Vanimo, there are only four beds for corona virus patients. This is how prepared we are. Where is the money? We are jumping up and down in Parliament but where is the money? People are dying in Eastern Highlands because there is no oxygen. Whose problem is it? It is the lack of management by this Government. Where are all the money?

We accept the fact that the vaccine is not the cure. The Health Minister admitted in his statement today that there is no cure for Covid-19. The vaccine is just an injection that we get to prevent the corona virus. But the fact is that this virus is here in this country. We are here debating but the debates did not originate from Papua New Guinea. Scientist all over the world are debating this issue on social media and our people are reading it. The people debating are qualified doctors and well-educated men and women. We are here jumping up and down so what is the problem? The problem is the mismanagement by this Government.

Mr Speaker, we are not prepared for this global pandemic. We have only allocated out of the K6.7 billion, that we borrowed, K501 million. The Central Province does not even have a hospital for itself.

Where is the money for awareness for our people?

Mr Wera Mori – Point of Order! With due respect to the Leader of Opposition, last year we allocated K2 million to each district in the country. It was money meant for awareness to our people. If I can do it in Chuave then I do not see any point in other Members of Parliament not doing the same for their electorates.

I therefore think that the Leader of Opposition must withdraw his statement about money because money has already been allocated.

Mr SPEAKER – I thank you for your point of order and it is in order!

Mr BELDAN NAMAHA – There is no K2 million for awareness. You are misleading this Floor. I am talking about awareness by professionals as in medical teams in our provinces. Do you know who is currently carrying out awareness? If you don't then let me tell you; it is the security forces. Instead of them carrying out awareness; they are abusing our people.

Mr Speaker, they are not trained to carry out awareness. This is not a law and order issue. It is a public health issue and it calls for hospitals, the Minister for Health, the National Government and the leaders of Parliament to mobilise and carry out the awareness with our people. We need to have professionals carrying out awareness and not security force personnel.

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Health Workers are hiding behind our security forces and they are abusing our people as we speak.

Mr Jelta Wong – Point of Order! The good Opposition Leader is saying that our health workers are hiding behind security forces but our health workers are in the frontline at this moment, they are not hiding behind security forces. Every message that we send out is not only from the health workers because they are too busy looking after our people so can the Opposition Leader stop misleading this House.

Yesterday, Governor Allan Bird mentioned that we must talk about facts and not things that will mislead our people. Our people are dying as we speak and this type of statements from the Opposition Leader is showing that he is not concerned about our people.

Thank you.

Mr BELDEN NAMA – Mr Speaker, I am talking facts because it is happening in my district. Do you know that the soldiers are belting up my people? That is a fact! Maybe you have not gone to your own district.

Mr Speaker, what happened to the K10 million that was given to Papua New Guinea BioMed who found a miracle cure? And here we are talking about the vaccine.

We promoted it and announced that BioMed found a cure so now, where is that miracle cure?

We want to know because Corona Virus is becoming very deadly.

Where is the equipment for our health workers, Minister for Health? Our health workers are not properly protected. You are talking about protecting our health workers but if you go to my district in Vanimo, the PHA in Vanimo you will find that there is no proper PPE's. in all the hospitals there no proper health facilities –

Mr Jelta Wong – Point of Order! Mr Speaker, again, the Opposition Leader is misleading this House. I have statements that show that PPE's have gone to Vanimo and I can show it to this House.

Please, do not mislead our people again!

Thank you.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Mr Speaker, how can you justify that there is no oxygen in the Eastern Highland Hospital?

Now, it is a fact that the hospital ran out of oxygen because you were not prepared for this pandemic.

Mr Allan Bird – Point of Order! Mr Speaker, when the Covid-19 pandemic first came into the country, there was a general agreement that we would have local responses and in order to accommodate the local responses the funding was directed to PHA's through the provincial governments to districts.

Mr Speaker, I am not trying to upset other provinces but in East Sepik when we ran out of oxygen in the last blight the East Sepik Provincial Government bought oxygen from Lae and took off to Wewak. We did not wait for the National Government.

So, Mr Speaker, I think we have to be fair. We are calling for autonomy on this Floor but when it comes to the practise of looking after our people we are turning back to the National Government. We have all received the funding to fight against Covid-19 so can we be fair.

Mr SPEAKER – Thank you, honourable Governor for East Sepik and your point of order is in order.

I would like to make a comment. In my district in Manus before the National Government gave any funding to the district or PHA, I released K2 million from the DSIP to my people to prepare for Covid-19.

I will let the Opposition Leader continue.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Thank you, Mr Speaker, I too did the same as you did. But, where is the national response –

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How much money did we put into PNG IMR? For this institute of medical research to be able to assist us, we have to fund them but we only give them K3 million. Is that how we treat the most important institution in our country that will do research.

Mr Speaker, we have a problem and the problem is that we are not managing the pandemic situation properly. And you know well and good, the provinces and districts have

done what they have to do but the problem is that there are no hospital beds throughout the country. There's no hospital bed in Port Moresby the biggest hospital in our country and here we are crying foul of people dying of coronavirus.

We must not hide behind the fact that we have failed our people and we have failed them big time. When I say equipping our health workers, we must properly equip them. That has been a big problem in all our hospitals throughout the country.

Why are the Central people turned away from Port Moresby General Hospital and Gerehu? Because there is lack of capacity in those major hospitals in our country.

Mr Speaker, when I talk about carrying out proper awareness, I am talking about our professionals going out there and doing a proper job. If you want to get all the people to get vaccines carry out proper awareness, we can't impose on them, they have their freedoms. Freedom is not legislated; we are born with our freedoms and no one can take away our freedom. We are born with it so let's respect that.

The Health Minister said vaccination is not the cure and so why are you jumping up and down, sit quietly and let me finish my speech. I did not disturb you when you were speaking.

Mr Speaker, we have serious issues in our country. We have a management issue, we cannot manage the situation, we only react to the situation. I do not have soldiers patrolling the borders because there is no funding to the soldiers. There is illegal crossing, almost every day. I fund the soldier's allowances on the border but it is the National Government responsibility.

Our borders are left wide open. That's what I am saying and here we are crying foul on coronavirus. What are we doing to prevent it?

There is no ration and soldiers have no money to buy food and I have diverted some money from the district to support the soldiers on the ground. The same is happening in Western Province.

Mr Speaker we have a real issue in our country and it is a management problem. Health Minister you are laughing because you cannot manage the health situation in our country. The PHAs have become all powerful no matter how much money you give to them they are buying vehicles, hire cars and no money is going into the hospitals and medicines. And in Vanimo they are writing prescriptions and citizens are going to buy medicine at the pharmacy. What are you doing as the Health Minister?

Mr Speaker, let's talk about reality and I am telling you the facts, wake up, go and visit the provinces stop sleeping and running around in Port Moresby only.

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Mr Jelta Wong – Point of Order! The Opposition is lying about things. I have been to Vanimo. I have gone and visited the Elias Kapavore building and the Patrick Pruiatch building; I have gone right through the whole hospital.

I have been around the country and I have seen a lot of things. Things that we want to change. Can he please stop lying on this Floor, telling people that we are not doing our job?

If we weren't organised, we wouldn't be in this position. We would have a lot more debts than anything. This Government has done everything. That guy over there has done nothing. How many years has he been in this Parliament? Can you tell me which Government has put into hospitals? Why hasn't he talked about times before when he was in Parliament? What did they do to the hospitals? Why are we doing it all now? Because we are seeing the needs to look after our people.

He cannot stand there and lie to this House and this country saying that, we have not done anything. We are putting more into health than any other governments.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr BELDEN NAMAH – Well, I cannot speak like him because I was never a Minister for Health. That is the problem. So, you have visited but you have not equipped my hospital in Vanimo. Visiting is one thing and properly equipping is another thing. Sorry my friend you have to understand and differentiate.

Mr Speaker, we need to properly treat this pandemic with caution. Whilst we advocate on vaccination, I would call for greater awareness. I would call for equipping our hospitals to respond properly to the outbreak.

Now we have Delta variant. There are more variants coming, and are we going to get vaccination forever or are the two jabs that we are getting is final. The Health Minister needs to tell us. If there are more variants; let's put it this way, there is Covid-19 and maybe we have Covid-20 and Covid-21 today and tomorrow we will have Covid-22, are we going to get vaccination forever? You have to tell us.

I am sure you do not know because you are not a doctor, that is the problem. Having you as the Health Minister when you are not a doctor, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, let me put it this way; let's get ourselves ready, prepared and properly equipped. We are two years on and we are not yet ready.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr JOHN ROSSO (Lae - Minister for Lands and Physical Planning) – Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to join this important debate this afternoon on this very important issue that is now facing our country, Covid-19.

I would like to commend the Health Minister for the work he has done so far, in very trying and tyrannous circumstances. I would like to also commend our Prime Minister and the Government for doing a great job.

Mr Speaker, with that I would like to thank the doctors here in the House also; proper professional doctors, people like Sir Puka Temu and the Honourable Member for Wabag, Dr Lino Tom. Also, people like the Member for Tewae-Siassi, Dr Kobby Bomoreo. We have three professional doctors in this House and we stand guided by these professional gentlemen, from both sides of the House. What they are saying are true and facts. We have to always be reporting facts.

The Health Minister is guided by the health professionals and scientists which are our own eminent Papua New Guineans who guide this fight against Covid-19. Of course, we have a very dilapidated health system, but that is something that we have inherited over the last years. I know the Health Minister and this Government is trying its best to fix that.

On top of that, I would like to also share my personal experience of Covid-19. These are facts. I was one of the first people to get Covid-19. I also did not believe that Covid-19 was real. I thought it was just flu or something like that.

On February, I was infected by Covid-19.

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I am not a doctor but I am informed there are three kinds of Covid-19. One is a mild one where you will recover and it comes with flu-like symptoms. The other is medium where you are steamed and isolated and you will recover while having serious headaches. But the one I got was very serious and I nearly died and I ended up three weeks in the hospital with one week in intensive care. I was sick for two months.

Mr Speaker, it is a serious matter from a person who didn't believe in Covid-19 to a believer now. Covid-19 is real and one of our good Members succumbed to this virus and also some Parliament staff. Those are the facts.

Why it didn't hit us at the first place is because as a government we stood together and protected our borders. The Prime Minister, Immigration Minister and the whole government stood firm and that is why we didn't feel the effects.

Then complacency set in. People started debating that we were impinging on individuals' freedom and now that we relaxed, we have been hit hard by the serious Delta variant strain.

Mr Speaker, I still have to go back for a lung check again but many people ridicule us and say, 'why is it that only Members of Parliament are getting sick and not the rest of the country?' As mandated leaders, we meet up to a thousand people a day and the custom and tradition of shaking hands exposes us to this risk.

As the good Minister for Health, and the learned doctor pointed out, there is no cure for Covid-19. Isolation and Oxygen are very important when you are in the serious stage.

Once I was diagnosed, I went back home to self-isolate for about seven days. I didn't eat for nine days until to a point where I started struggling for breath and I had to be rushed to the hospital and put on oxygen and that alone saved me. Then I was isolated for another three weeks.

Some of us here have been diagnosed but not at that severity. Some have underlying health issues but I have no underlying health issues. I am actually a pretty healthy person and if a healthy person like me should get that what chance does a person with underlying issues have.

If you have shortness of breath, yes, oxygen is the only thing that can save your life. This is from personal experience.

I was lucky because I am in a city and was taken to a hospital but what about a person who is far away in those rural areas where there is no oxygen? What hope do they have when they are short of breath and there is no oxygen?

Today, the only hope they have is to be vaccinated. It is very important and as soon as I recovered, I got my jab and yes, my immune system has been boosted rightfully like what the doctors have said.

A lot of people I knew personally in Lae and around me have succumbed and died because they refused to be vaccinated. At the same token, those I know who got vaccinated

still got Covid-19. So, that means that even if you still get vaccinated you will still get Covid-19 but the impact of the virus will be minimal and you won't die or end up in the hospital.

There are too many bush doctors who are saying we should do this and this will happen but the world's best practitioners have said to follow these guidelines for our own safety and I stand here because I followed those guidelines. If I didn't have oxygen, I wouldn't be standing here.

Mr Speaker and leaders, I implore you to stand as leaders because all our citizens are guided by what we say and do. What we say is guidance and leadership to our people. So, please vaccination is critical and it is important.

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That is the only thing that will help us and save our country, and it will also boost our economy. When we first introduced lockdown, a lot of businesses suffered. One good example is Lae. As the second largest city in PNG, a lot of people got laid off from work. The economy issues were enormous and many were laid off. We don't want to repeat this lockdown again. How can we stop this lockdown and interact with other countries by travelling again after vaccination? That will enable us to travel and open up borders so we can live normal lives again with the Niupela Pasin. It's very critical because the rest of the world have gone ahead because 3.5 billion people have been vaccinated and has world's best practice put in place and we as a nation need to follow the new world's best practice also.

Some of you here may recall in the New Year of 2000, when there was talk of Y2K and microchips. At that time most people panicked and some people said, 'don't get on the plane because they will crash.' We all panicked and got very scared. I even didn't get on the plane at that time and withdrew my money from the bank because I believed in superstitious people spreading false rumors by bullshitting through propaganda in the media. And now we are faced with this similar issue again.

In the New Year of 2000, people withdrew their money and no one travelled by plane on that day. We all can't deny that experience.

All these false rumors never eventuated and we are still here; it's the same bullshit.

Mr SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, that's the third time you are using this unparliamentary word, so, please, withdraw this word.

Mr JOHN ROSSO – Sorry, I withdraw it. So, this hoax which was propagated by a lot of people in 2000 really convinced us and we all thought that the world would end.

And now that history is repeating again, let's believe in facts, scientific evidence, world's best practice and lead our people properly.

With that, Mr Speaker, thank you very much.

Mr SPEAKER – Honourable Members, let me clarify this point. When a Member takes the Floor, all other Members accord him the attention and listen to the debate, therefore, the Chair deems it improper when a Member walks out whilst another Member is debating.

Mr KOBBY BOMOREO (Tewai-Siassi) – Thank you, Mr Speaker, I also want to join in the debate on Covid-19.

It's almost one month now since we celebrated our Independence for almost three days. There were celebrations all around the country which attracted huge crowds and that's when the virus spread so fast and affected many people.

The life span of the virus is five to six days and can live in the body for 14 to 21 days. So, from the end of September to the first week of October, we experienced the surge in Covid-19 cases.

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Once it becomes serious in October, the Controller tagged Goroka, Mt Hagen, Madang, Lae and Port Moresby as red zones. Many people have been travelling to and from Port Moresby for various reasons. Later we noticed deaths occurring here and there. Our people have not been given sufficient awareness to protect themselves from Covid-19 and people are congregating in '*haus kra*s' and elsewhere. This is a cycle that is repeating itself.

Mr Speaker, I do support vaccination but it will take time to reach the rural peripheries of our country. Our immediate action is to cut this cycle now! We have to cut it somewhere and this means the power to the Controller must be strict in stopping people moving from Madang to Lae.

I already have cases in my district that resulted from the gathering of womenfolk. I think it is the same elsewhere; for example, people had already gathered before the Goroko Show got put off. This would mean that the virus would have already spread before action was taken. Therefore, our immediate action now would be to cut off and stop the cycle. Our

Government must now be firmer than ever in order to put a stop to this cycle and cut out the spread of Covid-19. We can't only be talking about vaccine because it will take time to get its maximum effects.

Mr Speaker, I agree with Honourable Kerenga Kua. He mentioned that there is not enough supply of the vaccines. A few areas will receive the vaccine while others will not. We have given a lot of explanations and a lot of stories but let's face it. Let's cut the cycle and put a stop to the spread of Covid-19. Let's cut the cycle somewhere! This means stopping people travelling in and out of Port Moresby! Let's stop people travelling from the Highlands into Lae and vice versa! Let's just put a stop to all these travelling everywhere!

I believe there are repeaters put up by the Health Department. Let's put them up in road blocks, wharves, airports and do checks for travellers. If they are good to travel then they go but if not then lock them down. Let's cut the cycle somewhere! We can't keep on talking and not do anything about it.

The other thing is that; we are all confusing ourselves here. This is not a pharmacy. We have our own beliefs in getting healed but psychology plays a very big part in getting healed. You will only get healed if you want to be healed. This is the most important part of anybody getting healed. Therefore, as leaders, we must send out the right messages to our people. We cannot be seemed to be contradicting ourselves. We cannot be confusing ourselves hence confusing our people. We need to come up with an amicable decision and I want to see us decide as to how we can immediately cut this cycle.

Furthermore, we have people who have been vaccinated but yet test positive when they do check-ups. This sends out a wrong and untrustworthy signal to our people. However, let us be wary that the first protective barrier is our skin. The next barrier is the hair in our nostrils including slimes in our tracheae and oesophagus that collect dust and foreign material entering our bodies. These are the first line of defence in our bodies. Even after being vaccinated, one will always stand the chance of being infected. The vaccine is to help protect you if the virus enters your blood streams, however, if you are not vaccinated then you stand the risk of serious injury and possible death due to low protect mechanisms.

Mr Speaker, let us talk about facts here. We are talking too much about hearsay and not admitting facts. Our people want and need to know the truth. Can the Health Department carry out a massive awareness campaign on vaccination?

They can prepare the posters and give them out to all the district to educate our people that the vaccine is good and will stop the spread of the virus. Our people must be well informed so that they can be prepared to receive the vaccine when it is rolled out because if they are not educated on this, we will face many challenges.

Mr Speaker, I agree with the Minister for Petroleum, that we have a standardized plan on how the vaccination will be rolled out in the districts. All district must be treated the same and the reports must come back on who the vaccines are distributed.

Mr Speaker, I am coming to the end of my debate, this virus is real, it is not something to take lightly. I will be wrong if I ask you all to raise your hands if you are vaccinated so please, we are all leaders and we must get vaccinated and lead by examples for our people.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for National Planning and Monitoring)

– Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to contribute to this debate on this current issue of Covid-19.

I would like to commend the Minister for Health because under very trying times he has done his best. I think that he has given his ultimate best and when we say that our systems of health are not prepared for such occurrence, yes, it is true but when we are presenting statements we should think in the context. We have never been prepared for something like this even as a country, so having comments from the Opposition Leader and a few of our critics that we are not prepared is not fair. If the biggest democratic country in the world like India was not prepared for this pandemic then how can Papua New Guinea be prepared for it in this magnitude.

So, what we have done is our best; the best that a government can do. If you look at the statistics and the way we have managed the country when the pandemic came in, I think this government has done fairly well in this trying times. Instead of trying to crucify this government try compare us globally on how we have performed.

I would like to give my support and confidence to the Minister for Health, he has done fairly well. I think that there has never been a time where the health sector has been more concentrated on then now with the current pandemic and there have been more funds.

Mr Speaker, if you look at the way we have spent money for the last 46 years, we have never been prepared for such a pandemic. If you compare the number of beds to the supply of

oxygen, there are less than 100 beds in the country. When you compare how our hospitals and district health system operate - we have not even built provincial hospitals.

Mr Speaker, I am privileged to serve with three medical doctors in this Parliament when we are facing this pandemic. If we have not built provincial hospital like in Central Province, then that's not being prepared for in a time like this.

But, Mr Speaker, when we are making statements, we must make them in context, like our good Opposition Leader sometimes makes false statements. He is not present at this time but his Chair is here so I am addressing his Chair.

I would like to say thank you for debates we have heard, like the Governor of East Sepik said, 'We are managing the risks.'. The Government is trying to manage the risks like when the virus first arrived in the country; some said to shut the borders and then when did, the same people said no open the borders because we are going to die economically. So, the same preachers of these and that have been trying to distort the message we have been maintain on this Floor.

Mr Speaker, I would like to suggest two or three points so we can move forward as a Government.

Mr Speaker, when we talk about vaccination, there is one thing called 'facts' and the other is 'assumptions'.

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We come from various backgrounds; some of us are lawyers, accountants, and some of us studied science. In science, you must always deal with facts not assumptions. The world has so many assumptions. At one stage it was said, the world is flat, don't sail too far, you will fall off. The whole world revolved around the earth. Then we realized that the sun was the center of the solar system.

So, this type of beliefs existed before and when we had issues with vaccination, many of us became experts in one day on medical issues. Medicine is a subject that takes seven years to learn and practice and three of those people on this Floor out of 111 are qualified to be called doctors.

But because of Covid-19, we are all debating this issue here. One of these doctors said we sound like we are in a pharmacy debating about medicine.

Mr Speaker, my contribution to this debate is, companies have said, 'no jab; no job' but everyone has freedom protected by law.

Mr Speaker, the same law that protects an individual's freedom also mandates the government to protect society and that, we must understand. That same law gives us rights as a country to protect other individuals.

Mr Speaker, one of my professors in school once said, a medical doctor can kill a human being one at a time but if a parliamentarian does not make a proper decision, it can kill 100,000 people in a nation. That's what leaders can do.

Mr Speaker, about awareness, once in Cabinet we discussed this issue, the idea was to send K2 million to each district and let them be prepared at the district level. This is because many of our people are in the rural areas and not in the urban areas. Let us send the money to each district, LLGs, provinces and PHAs for them to be prepared for this.

We come to the Parliament and say there is no awareness but what did you do at the district to show for the K2 million that we expended and the PHA funds that we sent. The government reduced funding for national projects to cater for districts. We could have said, forget the districts and spend K600 million on building 22 hospitals. But we said, this is something new, let's send the money to the districts and that's what we've done.

So, when it comes to questioning what this government did; what did you do when we decentralized those funds to you. So, that's what the health sector in terms of our preparedness through the Health Minister has done.

Mr Speaker, my second last point is, they say we have our own beliefs and then there are facts. But those beliefs will not change facts. The facts are there. The world is suffering from Covid-19 and the fact seems clearer in this country that vaccination is the only way. That is the message we as leaders should be preaching on this Floor. Vaccination is the only way! We've talked about bush doctors but all these things are not working and people are now dying in numbers.

So, all leaders in this House must appreciate that we are not all medical experts. Let's take the statistics happening in the world and in our own hospitals and ensure vaccination should be the only message preached collectively.

Mr Speaker, my last point is, the Bible says, my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. The Oxford Dictionary's definition of knowledge is, facts, information, skills acquired through experience or education and understanding of a subject.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a medical issue and I don't think we qualify under the pretext of having knowledge of it. So, some of us need to shut up, appreciate, and let's move as a single unit to address this issue.

Mr Speaker, when you talk about awareness, many of us are speaking as if we are the Prime Minister. The country is already divided through its 89 members and 20 governors here. Why don't we go to our own provinces and tell our people? I should go to Finschhafen and he should go to Goilala and tell the people.

Mr Speaker, 70 per cent of the members are in Government. In that 70 per cent, we look at the numbers, we've been voted through a process, and if we can tell our voters to get vaccinated, we will be able to cover 60 or 70 percent of the population.

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You do not need to preach to the whole country to get vaccinated. Just tell your supporters to get vaccinated. It should be easier to tell our people in the village.

Each member from each province and district can cover much of the population. It is best to go to your own electorate and talk to your people about the vaccination program, rather than talking about the country. This would be easy for the vaccination roll out.

Mr Speaker, from the national perspective, the Prime Minister was the first person to be vaccinated when most of us did not agree. There is saying that goes, "when you become a member, you become a statesman of this country." When you die, the Government presents your body. To your village, which means your body belongs to the state.

Sometimes you must make decisions that represent the views of this collective House. When we are not bringing out the right message to the people, we get the people confused. For example, the conspiracy theories about this being a trial of the triple six concept. I challenge all the members to get vaccinated. Your body belongs to the State and we must make tough decisions that concerns the whole nation.

I thank the Prime Minister and the Health Minister for coming up with an initiative of building four major hospitals in the country. The four hospitals will be in Central, Mendi, Tari and Kimbe.

The Prime Minister has also given instructions to build other hospital facilities in this country, because of Covid-19. What we have not done in so many years, we are trying to do them now under the PPP arrangement. We are looking at cancer facilities and other facilities that have not existed which we should have prepared before now.

I know the Government is doing its part and it is injustice to say that the Health Minister is not doing his job. If the bigger countries and the people who have experienced

expertise and doctorates in medicine cannot handle Covid-19, how do you think people in Papua New Guinea and our frontline workers in the health system manage these issues.

Mr Speaker, coming to my last point, I appreciate the comments made by our doctors on this Floor; Dr Kobby, Sir Puka and Dr Lino. Sometimes it is good to just listen and work together. Instead, we come up with a lot of opinions and we talk just for the sake of speaking on the issue.

We should be focussed and working together because it is already here. It is killing the people. The signs are here and has facts. These are not assumptions anymore. We cannot be too opinionated and ignore the signs and facts of people dying every day.

Mr Speaker, the challenge as Government today is to listen and work together. When we are dividing this House, we are dividing the whole country in opinion. We should talk as one; move as one so that we can fix this issue.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Sir PUKA TEMU (Abau) – Excellent debate, Mr Speaker. I want to congratulate the Health Minister for giving a very good statement. It is factual and I fully support what the Health Minister has said.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, I want to thank you and congratulate you for setting up a vaccination tent here in the building at level one. Remember the last time I requested for Parliament to have a vaccination program; I appreciate that you have acted upon it so, I thank you for that initiative to look after all the leaders of this country.

Through you, Mr Speaker, I want to ask a question. How many of us sitting here on the Floor of Parliament have been vaccinated and if we can raise our hands?

Thank you and for those of you who have not been vaccinated, with the current third wave and particularly the Delta variant, you are in danger over the next two months. Because even if you receive the vaccine tomorrow, you will still be in danger until you received the full dose of vaccination like in the case of AstraZeneca where after receiving the first dose, you will receive the second dose after four weeks and it will take another two weeks before you have the right level of antibodies. .

Those of you who have not decided here and those of you who are listening throughout the country if you are against vaccination and you refuse to get it, you are the very people who are at the highest risk today in this country.

What the Minister is requesting is for all of us to agree to be vaccinated which is very important because many of us either through family relations or through the media have seen what's happening around the world and in our own country. We have already witnessed the reality of Covid-19.

I want to thank the Government for doing the things they have done. But let me say here that there has been a high level of complacency.

Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister will remember my advice to him which he accepted from day one which was to hit this situation hard early. Because, if we don't, this will spread very quickly. I am glad that the Prime Minister made that decision to hit Covid-19 hard.

Experiences and studies have now shown right around the world that where the Government is strong and in control Covid-19 has been controlled. But where the government is weak and the people are in control in expressing their freedom it has been hard to control the Covid-19 outbreak.

The first lesson here is that the Government must be bold and tough; the Prime Minister must make strong statements. I commend the Minister for Health for making a very strong and bold statement today.

Mr Speaker, our job is to send that message around the country. But like the Minister for Petroleum and Energy has said, we are now creating a demand and at the same time, we must readily prepare the extra supply.

After this debate, what's going to happen? It's such a big issue in the country.

Mr Speaker, as the head of the Legislative Arm of Government, when big issues arise there is always a bi-partisan approach. We have missed it.

Those of us who have good ideas are playing politics. We are playing marbles.

There must be a bi-partisan approach with this issue which is affecting us and I predict that we will not reach the peak for another three months.

So early in the peak, Goroka Hospital is stretched along with the largest hospital, the Port Moresby General Hospital.

Imagine the peak will still be coming in December, in the next two months, we won't have enough coffins, body wrappers, sanitisers, PPEs and many health workers will be sick and some will have already died.

Mr Speaker, Dr Kobby Bomoreo is absolutely right, whilst we are promoting vaccination, there is public gathering everywhere.

I have been texting the Governor of NCD many times when I saw people crowding in public areas to sell betelnut and I noticed that we stopped the awareness on social distancing.

The awareness is promoted on the radio and Facebook but not in reality; you go to Malaoro market or Koki Market people are still gathering.

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I went to Goroka two weeks ago to bring back the body of one of a relative who died of Covid-19 and to my surprise, the market just next to the airport was over crowded with people carrying out their daily activities of marketing. There was no control at all and I quite agree with the Governor's statement.

We introduced the *Pandemic Act* and appointed a Controller who has all the powers under the *Act* to implement it. But we have let our hair down too long and have been complacent for too long. And the virus is hitting us hard and we can't sustain it.

We allocated K500 million from the K6 billion but that's not enough. You talk about giving K2 million to the districts but that's not enough with this wave.

I had a briefing with my provincial task force last night with the Governor. The expenditure report was K3 million and the wave is hitting us now and we are trying to build a tent and employ two more doctors because we don't have any doctors at all and its really big issue.

I strongly recommend a bipartisan approach to this big issue. The Government is working hard but this Parliament must fully contribute to developing a national perspective by reaching the ward level which this Parliament must implement a bipartisan approach.

As a health professional with my two other colleagues in this Parliament, we are privileged to be serving at this time with qualifications in the medical profession.

One recommendation to our Prime Minister, Honourable James Marape, is to get the vaccination program out as far as we can and the entire immunisation program needs to be part and parcel of the Covid-19 vaccination program. And not just Covid-19 because our polio, measles and other illness vaccination rates are low. If there is an opportunity to build,

what I believe and my two colleagues will agree with me, the most cost-effective health intervention in the world is immunisation.

We can talk about building hospitals and I thank the Prime Minister for the plans, but it will come over time. We must discuss ways to address this third wave of Delta variant before we go for elections. Maybe, we can use drones to fly vaccines to the remote areas, get every district in every province to have a cold chain system that is working to using the green technology like the one Prime Minister promoted after his successful visit to attending UNGA and Houston on the P'nyang issue.

My strong recommendation is for the immunisation program to be rolled out to the entire country by using green technology. There is a solar wind mix power that can drive refrigerators which can be used by health workers not only for vaccines but their cold water as well, these technologies are available right now. So rather than talking about too many things, we should start doing them.

60/02

I think in the six months before we stop to go to the General Elections the focus for the Minister for Health should be getting the call system and the logistics management right. But in saying that we must seriously consider a bi-partisan approach, to this Covid-9 issue.

Mr Speaker, I also strongly believe and recommend that we establish a Director General of the Immunisation program where every child has a polio vaccine. When they are turning up for the Covid-19 vaccine they have a measles, bacteria, hepatitis-b vaccine. So in doing that we are building the system up. But we really cannot build the entire health system up overnight. It is a heavy system. It has taken all my life to concentrate on building the health system.

Mr Speaker, if there is one recommendation before I sit down; to the Honourable Prime Minister is, that you will do a great service to our children to protect them against all these world proven viruses and diseases. Science has proven that vaccinations do work, it has been saving millions of lives across the globe. The real scientific world is moving the entire world towards vaccination.

Mr Speaker, when I had the opportunity as the Deputy Prime Minister of this country from 2007-2010, I represented the country at the United Nations where I attended a special Committee meeting on the microbial issues on resistance and I did say, that nations of the world are spending billions and billions of dollars on warfare items but the real war is

between mankind and the microbial world. That is the real war right now. And it sure did come into existence with the Covid-19 virus. This is a RNA virus. That is why they were looking into it at Wuhan, because there is no science knowledge known in the world of this virus. So, Wuhan was set up to study the desires of RNA and when that knowledge is acquired, we can go into the DNA cell, we can manipulate a genetic disease and correct it by identifying it in the DNA, getting the RNA inside, and say, if you have cervical cancer, we are going to change that into RNA science and the normal cell will be propagated rather than the cervical cancer cell. That is the future of medicine in this world; RNA science. This science is new. This is exciting stuff for us in the medical profession. This knowledge is going to surface and the future impact, whether through a vaccine or through a therapeutic agent. The future is quite enormous. This will change everything in the medical world.

Mr Speaker, we need to support the science of RNA vaccine is in Pfuzer, in Johnson and Johnson.

Minister for Health, which of those vaccines will go to which age group? AstraZeneca to 60 years plus, young people below 50 you have the Pfuzer, Johnson and Johnson we promote those. We don't have the logistics or the cold chain system in place.

Mr Speaker, I call on the Prime Minister to strongly recommend a bi-partisan approach. I ask that we humble ourselves and use the Parliament to drive, not just the Executive Government, and the Opposition keep complaining, but please we all agree. Because the health of all of us in here is very important.

On this global issue that is a world pandemic we should look at the Australians where they have established an Executive Government where all their Premiers, Ministers and Parliamentarians come together to meet every month. That is the approach they have taken. Why are we just allowing the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health trying to think about this thing themselves?

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I would only like to recommend two things in this debate, first is that we must have a bi-partisan approach and secondly focus on strengthening the immunization system for the future of our children. May God bless Papua New Guinea.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr DOUGLAS TOMURIESA (Kiriwina-Goodenough) – Thank you, Mr Speaker, I too would like to participate in this debate.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Minister for Health on a job well done. Although, you are not a medical doctor, or do not have medical background, you have shown great leadership and you have shown that you are capable of delivering such a report. I, also would like to congratulate the Head of the Department. I would like to thank the Prime Minister as he is at the forefront leading, you have put your feet down on certain positions and you continue to encourage fellow colleagues especially the Cabinet to make certain that we on the same page.

I thought that Papua New Guinea would be one of the least countries to experience this pandemic but it has hit us much harder. We heard that countries like China, Europe, America and even Australia where hit very hard by this pandemic but Papua New Guinea waited until later. The government took the initiative to give K2 million to each district which I can't deny. The government has given sufficient resource to make certain that we prepare our district and provinces for such a time.

Mr Speaker, I will not speak too much on this, we all know that the world has been affected and it has caused a lot of confusion as we have never experienced such a pandemic of this magnitude. It has come at a time where some of us are laid back and are looking at other issues which are currently affecting us like the climate change, weather pattern and many others and that we did not prepare for this pandemic.

Mr Speaker, we all know very well that whilst our Government is taking the lead, we must be weary that there will always be opposition from expatriates, religious leaders, educated elites etcetera, but we must stand on the experience we are facing with the Eastern Highlands Province and the Highlands region. The call made by many of our leaders today to move swiftly is a smart call.

Mr Speaker, I think that the Government must have a strong position on their decision and we all must agree with it and enforce it. I have mentioned this in caucus in the very beginning and I will reiterate it.

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How will people of Papua New Guinea unite to get vaccine when there is a division among health workers? Some doctors are embracing vaccination and some doctors are opposing the policy of government.

Right from the onset, we must unite all health workers, then people will unite to get the vaccination. In this House all the leaders must have the same position when we stand united with the executive government and we go out and work together, then our voters, will agree with us. If we have two or three different positions how do we expect our people to listen to us.

Mr Speaker, the other thing; I buy newspapers every day and in the last six months I haven't seen any awareness in the newspapers about the drugs except for messages and news coming from the media. The government must have his position published in the newspapers, TV, or radio, get the message and awareness out to the people.

We sit and talk in this House, *Post Courier*, *National* and *TV* will publish for people living in Port Moresby and urban centers to read and what about the people in the remote area. We need to get to *NBC*, *FM 100* and get somebody with authority to speak and people will listen. But we need somebody with authority and recognized in the Health Department and Government to speak the language we are speaking today.

If, you want somebody to believe you have to speak with authority on that subject, get somebody with authority in health to come out and speak the message and get them to understand it. Only then will our people begin to believe that this person has spoken with authority on this subject.

(2) Mr Speaker, I want to talk on Papua New Guinea as a Christian nation. The country, Papua New Guinea is a Christian nation and for the sake of this House and people out there, I'll like say that the Bible has prophesied that the disease will come. I can remember when I was a small boy that the bell ring at 7 O'clock for prayer and in our home the old people say in future a disease will come and affect us but will be gone.

I like to point us to *Jeremiah 16:4* "*People will die of deadly diseases, they will not be able to mourn their dead, they will not be able to bury their dead*".

When this disease come many people will die and you will not see your parents or children because only the experts will bury them. The prophecy in the Bible had come to pass.

We are talking about washing hands and basic hygiene it's in the Bible when you read in Exodus 30:8,21 says wash your hands so that you do not die. We 've talked about Niupela Pasin is not Niupela Pasin it's the Olpela Pasin remains 2000 years ago.

In *Leviticus 13:4-5* said “*Keep a distance if you have symptoms, cover your mouth and avoid contact*”. It’s in the Bible, we need to live it. We call ourselves Christian nation and it’s in the Bible; read it.

63/02

Finally, on 12 it states that, whoever is sick should stay inside their tents for seven to 14 days. We are talking about quarantine. Whatever we are practicing and talking about is not a new thing. All it needs is for us to go back and be guided by the Holy word.

When there is a need for us to get vaccinated, we must please listen and follow. It is for the benefit of mankind. What are you waiting for? Are you expecting Parliament to give you all these instructions for your health?

It is already written in the good books. What it needs is for you and I to emphasise it; to go and tell our people that this must be done. Awareness is important.

Mr Speaker, let me finish by saying this, the executive government and this Parliament must immediately get out to the media. Give a mass media coverage to our people in the outer islands, the mountains and the remotest parts of Papua New Guinea. Get our experts to bring the message to them. Even if we publish the message through pidgin, motu or their own mother tongues, we must do it to get the message to the people of Papua New Guinea.

We must protect and educate our people. When we get this educated message to our people, our people will make proper decisions in order to be vaccinated.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr JAMES MARAPE (Tari-Pori – Prime Minister and Minister for Bougainville Affairs) – Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to thank you and the leaders from both sides of the House for sitting right through this day and debating this important issue of Covid-19 at this time of uncertainty.

Many a time we get a lot of criticism and of course, we are not lifting the hard yards outside, but we continue to sit and work long hours. I thank all the leaders for your time and patience for sitting right through the day without having a break. With that I would like to place on record my sincere appreciation to all our leaders in this House.

Covid-19 is an issue that should rise above politics. It has been almost two years now since we had the first Covid-19 case on 20 March, 2020. Many of us did not believe that

Covid-19 was real and so many was said, but here it is today. After months of living with Covid-19, it has now exploded in our face.

I would like to summarise everything and point us in a direction where all of us can respond and we will get out of this alive. This is not the first time a global pandemic has hit planet earth. In fact, the last pandemic that has struck planet earth was in 1918 and 1919. Over 500 million people were infected by the influenza and 50 million lives were lost.

During those times, they did not have the luxury of advance science and medicine or vaccines like we have today. So, 50 million lives were lost from that influenza which is a Flu. We think that flu is not really that serious but many lives were lost at that time of flu.

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Today as we speak, when we first started this operation when the first patient was diagnosed on 20 March 2020, the global case around that time stood around 234,000,000 infected people.

Mr Speaker, in fact our country was the first to legislate how we could walk, sit, talk gather when we introduced the *National Pandemic Act*.

And then we went to the Niupla Pasin and started imposing social distancing, wearing masks, limiting Haus Kari's and gathering in crowds. These were measures set out as public policy on 16 July 2020. At the time when we imposed all these, the global statistics stood at 1,337,853 cases and of that 580,045 took place globally.

On 10 October 2021 global statistics now stand at 283, 000,000 plus that have been infected. 4.8million people have died but to be exact is 4 862 309.

In our country, after the first case on 20 March 2020, our statistics show 23 149 tested positive for Covid-19 and a lot recovered but and we have 252 certified deaths in Covid-19. There are deaths we don't know because they are in the rural areas.

Covid-19, is here in the country and I want to take this opportunity to thank all the Members on the Floor today debating on this issue today.

Vaccination is not a new thing on planet earth and it has been a part of the medical approach to boost our natural immunity to defend us when these kinds of specific diseases arises.

The vaccine we are talking about is not only manufactured by America, England, India or China. Chinese scientists studied this vaccine and have manufactured. American scientists have studied this vaccine and it goes out to all these countries in Europe, Australia, India and

right across this globe, over 2 billion people have been vaccinated and the number increases as we talk now. In United States alone over 212,000,000 have been vaccinated.

I want to encourage the citizens of this country not to believe too much on all kinds of speculations. We have been one of the first countries to cue up at the WHO to acquire the vaccine and bring it to our country. In this juncture I want to thank the Australian Government and its people and WHO and the kind people in the United Nations who have assisted us to get the vaccine and bring it to our country much earlier than many nations throughout the globe.

65/02

It is sad that only 152 547 have received their first dose and those of us who received both first and second dose is at 76 000 both male and female. So, of this 76 000 who received the dose are still alive. I was the first person to receive the dose but I am still alive and 100 percent well and healthy. The Lord only knows when you and I will die but otherwise if you are reckless than you will bring it upon yourself.

The vaccine that is made available in this country is not for killing all the people but it will protect you from Covid-19 when borders open. When you see big countries like USA, they are fully equipped with facilities to protect their borders but every day they have around 500 000 cases of Covid-19.

Mr Speaker, there is no country in the world that is effectively policing its borders to stop Covid-19 from spreading. The Opposition Leader mentioned that we failed, but let me say, this we tried our absolute best against continual negativity which his mouth always spins every time. He is one big mouth to spin negativity in the country regarding Covid-19. Those of you who spin negativity regarding Covid-19 in the country must know that the blood of these people dying from Covid-19 will be on your hands. You continue to spin negativity when the vaccine is already on the shelf.

Today is not the right time to talk negative and search everywhere for each other's faults. And also, the kind of politics we play in this country disturbs the flow of work. Almost half of 2020 and 2021 was stopped due to unnecessary politics which had a direct effect on public service effective functionality in our country.

We are faced with this situation so we all must rise today. The Government is not debating from the blue but I want to present a brief report. Last year in June the Treasurer mentioned that K5.6 billion was allocated to Covid-19 times as economic stimulus. The funds

allocated during the time of Covid-19 was to maintain all the health workers working at the hospitals and it was allocated under the 2020 budget.

The National Government allocated funds directly to PHA in health sector was K37 million and that was in the second batch and in the first batch we allocated K4.4 million to all the PHAs totaling K200 000 each to commence work on Covid-19 when it first occurred. These funds were allocated to boost all the PHAs work to fight the virus with the exception of Port Moresby General Hospital. The donor agencies helped enormously which we also combined and distributed. With that I want to thank all the partners who are always behind us in helping fighting this virus they are: Australian Government, UNICEF, United Nations Family of all the donors, Indian Government, Japan Government, New Zealand Government, China Government, which contributed in cash and kind but total cash received especially from DEFAT helped us in cash totaling K22.25 million, Covax Facility gave us K5 million, New Zealand Government gave us K5.9 million, WHO and the others K600 000 in cash. So, in total it was about K74 million distributed to all our PHAs.

66/02

Why I am saying this is the Provincial Health Authorities are in your provinces close to you. It is 16 months now since those disbursements took place.

So, there is K74 million there and if we add K60 million, the K500, 000 to each district and province through the leaders, if we also add another K500 000 for Covid-19 response preparations which is another K60 million gone through the DDA and the provincial government conduit then you are looking at a resource in excess of K200 million been transferred to our Provincial Health Authority system and through the districts and the provinces throughout the 89 districts and 21 provinces and our special regions of Bougainville. On top of these, the direct K1 million for the agriculture SME interventions we gave to all districts and provinces.

All this was happening last year, 12, 13, 14 months earlier. We had a foresight that this thing might blow up in our faces.

Our clinical response in reference to isolation, vaccine and medication must run side by side with non-clinical response.

I think Sir Puka is right by saying there was a huge complacency because we were thinking we are super-human beings and we are immune to this virus. Well today it's here with us now, no two ways about that.

I want to point some directions for all of us to work together and with.

I want to commend those leaders who have put their heads down for their people and I must say last time I went to visit Kimbe I was totally blown away when I saw the Governor for West New Britain and Member for Talasea working together to build a specialised isolation facility built into the hospital. I posted these photos on the Government *WhatsApp* group. The facility was built from the allocations we gave all the PHAs. They never waited for more money. Today they have a response mechanism.

Same goes to the NCD Governor who worked closely with his PHA and they came up with an intervention to convert the Taurama Aquatic Centre and the Rita Flynn netball facility into a temporary mobile isolation unit if there is an overflow in the PMGH.

Whilst the multi-millions may not come the little allocated to the PHAs, DDAs and the provinces must be used to step up. What has happened has happened. We are now at this point in time.

I want to make some points and summarise what has happened so far as we go forward.

Covid-19 is here and the mutations are taking place meaning that the Delta variant strength might go to another level of strength into the future.

If my Bible is not wrong and the Bible is never wrong, it points to us living in times of the pandemic and sicknesses as we go towards the end times. We just have to respond to step up.

The Government is focussed on today trying our best to arrest the increasing situation whilst at the same time making interventions focussed on improved health care system in our country projecting in the year 2025, giving a better health care system in 21 provinces and our Special Region of Bougainville.

The Prime Minister and the Minister for Health alone cannot make this a reality. The Health Minister is right in that I have been telling the PHAs for the last 12 months that they must respond to us.

67/02

The PHAs; you are not made of super-human beings. You are in direct oversight of the health care system in the provinces. When the Prime Minister, Minister for Health and the secretary ask for your basic reports to be submitted, please, submit them. These reports help us plan how best we can assist each province.

Sadly, to date, we have not had any responses. If you have responded, it has not reached my office. The Minister has been asking for so long but I do not know if they are listening to him.

Now, if the PHA system is not working properly then I propose that in the November Sitting, we can revisit the reporting and structure of this system because during this time I realised that they are not responding to the Health Secretary or anyone. The intention was good to eliminate the impediments that we have in the Health System that hindered access to direct support. But, in the last year there has been no response so maybe they are thinking that we are asking for the acquittals. The acquittals are one thing but we want to know the plan of how we could increase the bed spaces.

Today, I want to state that while we are waiting for the new 22 provincial hospitals, we can make interventions and we are ready to unbundle quite a substantial amount of resources, up to K400 million, just to improve the existing capacity in our hospitals. The Department of Health has agreed on bringing in 1000 beds for hospitals in our country over the next two years and, in fact, we are thinking critically of making an intervention right away in the existing hospitals we have.

In key district areas like Western Province; Daru has its own and Kiunga has its own. In places closer to provincial headquarters where there is an existing provincial hospital it will be extended so it can be looked after properly. And for places far away - thank you, Mr Elias Kapavore, for establishing the new Pomio Hospital there. The Pomio Hospital can become the hospital for the people of the south side of the New Britain Island because it can serve the people of Kandrian in West New Britain and also the people of East New Britain.

I have been asking the PHAs to send their reports in on how we could make interventions, including the status of the testing facilities, PPE storage, et cetera. I want an entire complete report on how we rise to handle Covid-19 as well as every health care; it is incumbent on the PHAs to do this.

Today, I would like to thank the Government Caucus, for understanding where I am coming from in saying that I will not be giving funds direct to the provinces or districts in as far as health response is concerned. I want to see PHA plans before we can fund the plans and make it happen.

Mr Speaker, I am emphasising on this because our Government's Policy remains that vaccination is an individual choice and we just have to accept that a vast number of people will be reluctant to get vaccinated. So, we might be talking about vaccination and we do not

fix the health care system to cater for the sick. Please, PHAs, send your reports in and let us look at how we can address all the areas, including places like Central Province where there are no provincial hospitals. As I mentioned this morning there can be three hospitals built; one in the Sogeri area, one around the Laloki area and the other along the Magi Highway but it is dependant upon the PHAs to come with the plans.

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All this is dependent upon PHAs to come with a game plan for an immediate response to vaccination followed by the medium and long-term plans. So, I'm dwelling much on this one simply to impress upon our key players, the PHA leadership, to be sensitive to the need to send in their game plan to us and we will try commit funding going forward.

As we work through this, I want to put some thoughts forward. The expansion of hospital beds that we currently have must run in a simplified manner. The testing facilities including adequate PPE and cold chain that Sir Puka mentioned, we must step it up. We will build additional medical facilities like mortuaries.

Few months back when I talked about building and ensuring that our mortuaries are functional, here at National Control Center, they thought I was joking. These are basic things. We take good care of bodies in a safe manner. So, for all these basic functions and health system to work, I delegate the commitment to National Government to stand ready to ramp it up and all I require is the game plan from 21 PHAs and of course our special region of Bougainville to come in.

I informed the Health Department to look at the 12 nursing colleges and community health worker schools across the country including our medical school at PAU, Taurama UPNG campus as well as Divine Word to see if we could train our student medical trainees to be able to be mobile in assisting our health workers and this is something we want to do.

I want to announce that Government is looking at insuring all the health workers and police personnel who are vaccinated and are working on the frontline. They are ones defending us against Covid-19.

For us in the districts and provinces, we are trying to address flexible ways to operate district and provincial resources so that you can give the focus to Covid-19 during this period. Pay a special interest to your hospital requirements and needs. The Finance Minister has been asked to ensure his department looks at the financial instruction that allows for our district and provincial resources to be unbundled to the health care of our people because this is no

ordinary time we are going through. This is an extraordinary time in far as Covid war is concerned.

I just want to encourage our people in Papua New Guinea don't fear in vaccine. Vaccine was made by scientist to assist us to have defense against Covid-19.

Covid-19 is spreading so, please, go and get that vaccine. Whilst it is not compulsory, it is advisable for you to get it. If you don't then stay in your house and be safe.

I want to also encourage our people not to travel from place to place. The National Controller will use the *Control Pandemic Act* and to try stop the movement from province to province whilst you can work, operate, live and limiting the time of curfew. We will announce those measures in the coming days and will prevent the spread of Covid-19 and work towards keeping our country safe.

There will be an announcement coming up in due course. I just want our citizens to know that we are doing our best to try to ensure we contain this pandemic from blowing in our face and losing more lives because in not doing so we will still see a lot of lives being lost to this Covid-19.

Our policemen will assist with the 'Niupela Pasin' and Defense Force are still manning our borders. Although it's not coming through our borders but is evident that the first influx of Covid-19 coming through our boarders and as well as Delta Variant. The Defence Force will still be manning our boarders to ensure borders are kept safe.

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I want to conclude by thanking all leaders who have sat in through this meeting. Our leadership role must be maintained at all levels whether you are in the district, provincial or national level. Let us rise up and take charge of the Covid-19 endeavours whether it is infrastructure, vaccination or health care. For governors in provinces, consult your PHAs and work with him. If you are not working with that key person then I don't know what you are doing here by making noise in Parliament. Call your PHA chairman and inform him that the Government wants a report on the things needed to equip the provincial hospital to be prepared to face the challenges brought by this pandemic. So, Governors, consult your PHAs and the 21 reports should come to the Government and we will see how best we can assist and support to build our capacity on the ground.

The National Government is prepared to unbundle its resources and go to work but lastly and most importantly to our people, you yourself have this responsibility to your

country, to your community, to your family and to yourself. Get vaccinated. If you don't want to be vaccinated remain at home, stay away from getting Covid-19.

Mr Speaker, God exists, but God has also given us wisdom and knowledge to make wise decisions. For instance, you cannot voluntarily shove your hand into the fire and think that God will save you, the fire is there and you are here, and god has given you the wisdom to avoid getting burnt by the fire. If you however willingly walk into the fire, you get burnt. So that is the simple analogy. Let's use our common sense and God will play his part while we play ours, thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Motion – That the question be now put – agreed to

Motion – That the paper be noted – agreed to

Paper noted.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Mr SPEAKER – I would like to inform the Members of Parliament that the Parliament has arranged for the vaccination team to set up outside on the first floor between A Wing and B Wing so any Member of Parliament who wishes to be vaccinated can go there to receive it.

This is an initiative of parliament and the total number of parliamentary staff and political staff who have received vaccination to date stands at 196.

I would also like to inform Parliament that we will host the funeral of our late colleague, Honourable Roy Biyama, here in Parliament tomorrow. So, I ask all Members of Parliament to show our respects at his funeral.

MOTION BY LEAVE

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen - Minister for National Planning and Monitoring) – I ask leave of Parliament to move a motion without notice.

Leave granted

**PERMANENT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS –
APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER**

Motion (by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) agreed to –

That Mr Lohia Boe Samuel be appointed a Member of the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Public Accounts.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion (by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) agreed to –

That Parliament do now adjourn

The Parliament adjourned at 4.25 p.m.