



OAU DRIVE, TOWER HILL, FREETOWN

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

[HANSARD]

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

FIFTH SESSION - FIRST MEETING

TUESDAY, 10TH OCTOBER, 2017

SESSION – 2016/2017



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PARLIAMETARY DEBATES

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First Meeting of the Fifth Session of the Fourth Parliament
of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone.

Proceedings of the Sitting of the House
Held Tuesday, 10th October, 2017.

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THE CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Official Hansard Report of the Proceedings of the House

**FIFTH SESSION – FIRST MEETING
OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC**

Tuesday, 10th October, 2017.

I. PRAYERS

[The Clerk of Parliament, Mr Ibrahim S. Sesay, Read the Prayers].

[The House met at 10:43 a.m. in Parliament Building, Tower Hill, Freetown].

[The Deputy Speaker, Hon. Chernor R. M. Bah, in the Chair].

The House was called to Order

Suspension of S. O. 5[2]

II. CORRECTION OF VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY SITTING HELD ON THURSDAY, 5TH OCTOBER, 2017

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, we go through the record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting, held on Thursday, 5th October, 2017. As usual, we go page by page. Page 1? Page 2? Page 3?

HON. EDWARD S. JENGO: Mr Speaker, Page 2. I was present and I participated in the proceedings that day.

THE SPEAKER: Mr Clerk, please take note of that.

HON. ALHASSN KAMARA: Yes for two weeks running.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you are saying two weeks running? I do not have records for two weeks. The record I have is for today. Mr Clerk, please take note. Page 4? Page 5? Page 6? Page 7. There being no further amendment or correction, can someone move for the adoption of the record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting, held on Thursday, 5th October, 2017 as amended?

HON. AMADU M. KANU: Mr Speaker, I so move.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder?

HON. ALIMAMY G. KARGBO: I so second, Mr Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Any counter motion?

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Record of Votes and Proceedings for the parliamentary sitting, held on Thursday, 5th October, 2017 has been adopted as amended]

III. BILLS

[i] THE FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL ACT, 2017

INTRODUCTION AND FIRST READING

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MR MOMOH VANDI [*Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Development*]:

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, 'The Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017 being an Act to provide for direction to Agencies of government to transfer Revenues or other Moneys received by Agencies into the Consolidated Fund and for other related matters be read the first time.

[Question, Proposed, Put and Agreed To]

[That the Bill entitled, 'The Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017' has been read the first time]

SECOND READING

MR MOMOH VANDI: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, 'The Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017' being an Act to provide for direction to Agencies of government to transfer Revenues or other moneys received by Agencies into the Consolidated Fund and for other related matters be read the second time.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Bill entitled, 'The Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017' is intended to provide efficient and effective management of revenue collections, to provide for the consolidation of government revenues and to provide for other related matters. The object of this Bill is divided into five clauses as follows:

Clause 1 is the commencement clause. It provides the date the Act shall be deemed to have come into operation; Clause 2 is the interpretation clause and it provides for the interpretation of certain terms in the Bill; Clause 3 provides for the transfer of funds into the Consolidated Fund by agencies of government. It stipulates that:

- all moneys held in the accounts of agencies of government shall, after coming into operation of this Act, be transferred into the Consolidated Fund;
- where in any enactment, it is provided that revenues or other moneys received by an agency of government are to be retained by that agency for the purpose,

including defrayed expenses of that agency, such revenues or other moneys shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund, notwithstanding any provision to the contrary contained in the enactment; and

- where in any enactment it is provided that revenues or other moneys received.

Clause 4 makes provision for the Minister to amend the shadow of this Act by Statutory Instrument. The shadow is a list of agencies of government required to transfer revenues or other moneys received by them into the Consolidated Fund; and Clause 5 provides for the power of the Minister to make regulations for purpose of giving effect to the provisions of this Act.

Having said that, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, 'the Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017 be read the second time.

[Question Proposed]

HON. HASSAN B. SHERIFF: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to believe that the Bill before us has been on the shelves for the past five months; but today, the Minister has finally brought it to this House for Members of Parliament to give their comments and observations. The purpose of this Bill, according to the Minister, is for the efficient and effective management of funds. I am sure this is not new and it is just to add value in the system. Of course, the Minister of Finance has identified six agencies that will be transferring funds to the Consolidated Revenue Fund. But let us be mindful that these agencies have, for the past nine months, been running their own affairs. If this Bill is passed into law, they are going to give funds in their bank accounts. These agencies also have responsibilities of preparing financial statements at the end of every financial year and to have a cut-off date at the ninth month of the year. I must state here that it will be difficult, in my opinion, for the Audit Service to conduct an audit on these agencies. One of the agencies, the Petroleum Directorate, is still in its infant stage and it has set aside money for training programmes under the Petroleum Act. These agencies have employees' benefits accounts, which they may have to pay at the end of their services. I hope consideration will be given to those specific accounts that have been set up by these agencies for their staff benefits. I

want to agree with the Minister to remit these moneys from their accounts to the CRF; but to say moneys set aside by these agencies to meet employees' benefits, we have to reconsider that position.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to suggest that we put the structures in place. I think we brought that issue up in our discussion yesterday. It is easier said than done to have money transferred from one account to the other, but the question is what structures are being put in place? I just hope that after the passage of this Bill into law, you will call on your staff at the Ministry to put the necessary structures for these MDAs to enable them meet their financial obligations for remaining three months. I want to believe if that is not done, there is going to be a disaster and chaos in these offices. So, I hope the Minister of Finance seated before us will send the message loud and clear to all the departments at the Ministry of Finance, particularly the Revenue and Policy division.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this is a very short Bill. The phenomenon in this Bill is that it gears towards putting moneys together and give the responsibility to the Minister of Finance in terms of transferring these funds to the CRF. The issue is how effective and efficient the Minister is going to manage these funds is another challenge. So, I hope the Minister will have that in mind and work towards the best interest of the people of this country. We want to see an efficient and effective Fiscal Management Bill being passed into law. Thank you very much.

HON. FODAY RADO YOKIE: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am very happy for this Bill before us. For those of you who could recall, I am one person in this House who has been giving extensive lectures on fiscal indiscipline. I have been providing extensive lectures on fiscal indiscipline and one way we can screw those loose ends is to have a Single Treasury Account and that is just what this Bill is talking about. It is a way of mitigating our excessive expenditure government cannot trace. What basically this Bill is talking about is that all moneys can be accounted for from a single point. If XYZ collect moneys and expend, we will not know as a government what has been collected. In fact, the same government provide allocation to these MDAs. To me, that is double

expenditure, but if this Bill is passed into law, we can now track those moneys. If, for instance, Ministry 'A' is going to source fund from a private donor, we are basically saying that the money should be brought to the treasury. When you want to expend, write some explanation that you want to expend such amount of money. This Bill will enable us track that expenditure and it is a means of mitigating fiscal indiscipline. Like I said, we are doing fine as a nation, but our major challenge is fiscal indiscipline. So, this Bill is straight forward and it is good for any government.

THE SPEAKER: Is it healthy?

HON. FODAY RADO YOKIE: Exactly, Mr Speaker. It is very healthy and pure. The Minister himself will respond to what the shadow Minister of Finance in this Parliament will be saying; i.e., the Deputy Majority Leader. Let me just allay your fears that even the benefits for Members of Parliament are going to be determined from the same Consolidated Fund. So, what is wrong with the other MDAs that their own benefits cannot be accounted for? The Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], for instance, is a very good Agency, but nobody can tell us how much they have collected on behalf of the people of Sierra Leone. In the same token, nobody can tell us how much they have expended on behalf of the people of Sierra Leone, but yet they stand to benefit from the small resources government will raise in terms of appropriation. That is double expenditure and we must do something to forestall this practice. We do not want one particular Agency to be more powerful than some other agencies.

Again, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, nobody will tell us precisely the royalties and licenses they are collecting. During the past hearings on the Appropriation Bills in this House, we have always questioned them to give us a comprehensive income analyses of moneys generated from those sources. So, it is good for the Ministry of Finance to assume that responsibility. MDAs are allowed to collect on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone or on behalf of the people of Sierra Leone and remit same into the Consolidated Fund. If you want to expend any amount of money, you have to come to the Ministry of Finance and say, I want to expend XYZ and the Ministry will either approve or disapprove. Therefore, when it comes to accountability, it is only the

Ministry of Finance that is charged with that responsibility in terms of allocation and expenditure. When it comes to accountability, the people of Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Finance is now charged with the responsibility to give account on behalf the MDAs. So, this is a very good Bill. To me, the Bill came late, but is better late than never.

Having said that, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to admonish this noble House to pass this Bill into an Act, so that we can save more funds. I am saying this because in the next five months, I will be in that place and it will be better for us when we take over the governance of this country.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I am not sure whether I will be spending too much time on this Bill. So, it is interesting that the interest in the debate is getting bigger, but there is a bigger Bill that I will expect you to talk on more than this one. So, I want to prepare you mentally.

HON. BENNEH BANGURA: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Bill is a very fine one. And like my colleague on the other side said, it is even too late. But Mr Speaker, you will agree with me that to every rule there must be an exception. That is the reason I stand before you this morning.

THE SPEAKER: There are exceptions already because they have not captured everybody.

HON. BENNEH BANGURA: Mr Speaker, I want to zero in on a particular agency that is also captured in this Bill; i.e., the National Telecommunication Commission [NATCOM]. NATCOM is a very fine agency and had done so much for this Government. Sometimes last year, the issue about remitting funds into the Consolidated Fund came up. During that debate, it was agreed that $\frac{1}{3}$ of whatever NATCOM collects should be remitted into the Consolidated Fund. NATCOM has been seen doing that; and even yesterday, their $\frac{1}{3}$ was paid into the Consolidated Fund. However, other agencies have not been seen doing that. There are agencies that are very peculiar and important because they engage in so many revenue generating activities in the name of government.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you are advised not to make examples.

HON. BENNEH BANGURA: Mr Speaker, because some agencies had been cooperating effectively to what was debated last year, I think consideration should be given to them. I rest my case.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. Your point is noted.

HON. JUSUFU B. MANSARAY: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker for giving me this opportunity. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, discipline at every level is necessary in a nation, most especially in the financial situation of Sierra Leone. My brother, who is going to be our next Minister of Finance, has just made a reference to the Environmental Protection Agency. I want to caution that any time it relates to finances, there are delays from the Ministry of Finance. Now, we are faced with so many activities in this nation relating to the EPA. And if that agency is responsible to save this nation through its activities, I think we should allow them to collect those moneys and expend them on their activities, rather remitting those funds into the Consolidated Fund. Few days ago, that EPA was looking for money to go and put situation under control. It took some time for them to do that because of lack of sufficient funds. I want to appeal that some amounts are put aside for their operations. If we fail to do that, you will be having problems and this nation will be faced with very critical problems.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, some of the conditions given to some of these Agencies are so stiff that they pay subscription to enable them attend international conferences. If moneys are not kept aside for these functions, the Agency will not function effectively. I am not saying that the Ministry of Finance will not respond to any request they make, but sometimes it takes time to do so. I am suggesting for some percentage to be retained by some agencies for their operations. I thank you.

HON. ROSALINE J. SMITH: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to join my colleagues in supporting the Ministry of Finance for bringing this Bill to this House. To me, the Bill is meant to ensure that government activities are run smoothly. I want to

thank the Minister for their vision because we have been hearing about the financial constrains the Government is going through these days, especially in paying salaries and implementing some programmes.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to state that government is short of funds and we have institutions in this country that are generating so much funds. We ratified the Finance Act, which allowed MDAs to remit funds into the Treasury Single Account or the Consolidated Revenue Fund. However, all of us know that Sierra Leone is highly disaster prone. Therefore, I want to appeal to the Ministry of Finance in case of disaster, let there be an Emergency Fund Account for the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] that handles issues relating to environmental disaster. In as much as all the moneys are going into the Consolidated Fund, I want to appeal, for the good of this nation, that we set aside a Disaster Management Account, so that when a disaster happens, these moneys will be readily available to be disbursed for that purpose. The Bill is in place and it is timely.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to support this Bill, so that the Ministry of Finance takes full control of moneys raised by MDAs. I thank you.

HON. SIDIE M. TUNIS: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Bill we have before us is a very good one, but it also requires lot of attention. The Bill is intended to enhance government cash flow. For the past two days, we have been engaging the Ministry of Finance and officials along with other MDAs listed in this Bill. Government, through the Minister of Finance, has given assurances to most of these MDAs that their moneys will be protected. I want to believe that the major issue here is the ability of the Ministry of Finance to handle the quantum of money that will be remitted into the Treasury Single Account. If we do not have the structures in place to handle these moneys, we are going to have a very serious problem. Therefore, I want to call on the Minister of Finance to ensure that we have the necessary structures in place to receive these moneys.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, some of the agencies listed in this Bill are very technical in nature. The Chairman of the Committee on Information and Communication

spoke about NATCOM. I want to restate that telecommunication is a fast growing industry and things usually happen every hour. Therefore, if there is going to be any situation wherein the Ministry of Finance will retain some moneys for this institution, I will want to suggest that the Ministry of Finance puts modalities in place wherein, if the money comes in, it is automatically remitted into the Consolidated Revenue Fund. This is because the purpose of this Bill, as the Minister explained, is to take over the management of those funds. However, the Minister made it very clear that in meeting with the MDAs he was ready to sign a memorandum of understanding with these agencies that once the moneys are remitted into the CRF, the respective agencies would have access to those moneys.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am appealing to the Minister of Finance to ensure that we have all the structures in place, so that this agencies have access to their moneys.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am calling on this House to speedily pass this Bill into law. I thank you.

HON. LEONARD S. FOFANAH. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have indeed agreed upon one single principle that this Bill is totally non-controversial and it is needed here and now for the implementation of government programmes. Like some Honourable Members said, the Bill is in fact coming a little bit late. That is indeed very true. For example, this Bill has been on the notice paper of Parliament for a very long time and the Ministry is only bringing it now. That is well and good.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have heard some contributions and some suggestions, but the purport of this Bill is to ensure that revenues collected on behalf of the Government are not collected for themselves. I want to remind all and sundry that MDAs are creatures of government. They are collecting those revenues and resources for and on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone. If you were to juxtapose the Government to an individual family, there is of course a difference. There are those times when the children will become wealthier than the father; but in this circumstance, we cannot afford to allow creations of the Government to be wealthier than the central

government. I have heard the suggestions from the Honourable Member from Bo saying that some MDAs should be allowed or be assured that they should have access to their money.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the other Member from the Western Area suggested for Disaster Management Account for emergency situations that will arise from time to time. Even before now, the Central Government was responsible to take care of emergency situations, but the essence of this Bill is to ensure that resources that are lying idle elsewhere are brought into the CRF, so that government can have access to them. This has lots of advantages because it provides for effective planning and implementation, and analyses for a cash flow system. This enable the Government to know what it has and what it is expecting. When that happens, these MDAs are always provided for by the Central Government and they will be taken into account in terms of the revenues that they are generating. We want to allay the fears of Honourable Members that these MDAs are not equal in stature and in terms of the ability to generate revenue. The Central Government is responsible for all MDAs and when these funds are available, it will provide for effective planning and will also provide the government with a balance account, so that they will know exactly what they have at all times.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, like we have said, this Bill is non-controversial and I will therefore expect that we rally round to see its smooth passage here and now. I thank you very much.

MR MOMOH VANDI: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, let me thank the Honourable Members for their respective contributions in support of this Bill. I have taken notes of the concerns and suggestions that have been raised by the Honourable Members and they will be addressed accordingly. Therefore, I move that the Bill entitled, the Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017 being an Act to provide for direction of Agencies of Government to transfer revenues and other moneys received by the Agencies into the Consolidation Fund and for other related matters be read the second time.

Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to

[The Bill entitled, the Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017 being an Act to provide for direction of Agencies of Government to transfer revenues and other moneys received by the agencies into the Consolidation Fund and for other related matters, has been read the second time].

THE HOUSE REVERT TO COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE STAGE

Clauses 1 to 5, including the Schedule proposed

MR MOMOH VANDI: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, I move that Clauses 1 to 5, including the Schedule stand part of the Bill.

Question proposed

THE SPEAKER: Page 1? Page2? Page3?

HON. AJIBOLA MANLEY-SPAIN: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, Page 3, Clause 5[2]. I believe that during the debate, many people were asking when and how moneys can be obtained into the Agencies. This is provided for in 5[2]. However, my problem is that it does not state clearly when... - *[Interruption]*.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, the Regulations will come with those details.

HON. AJIBOLA MANLEY-SPAIN: Mr Chairman, to allay the fears of Members of Parliament, if we have the Regulation, then we will advise on that.

MR MOMOH VANDI: Mr Chairman, Honourable Members, I move that Clauses 1 to 5, including the schedule, stand part of the Bill.

[Question, Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Clauses 1 to 5, including the Schedule form part of the Bill]

[THE HOUSE RESUMES]

MR MOMOH VANDI: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I report that the Bill entitled, 'the Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017 having gone through the Committee of the Whole House, be read the third time and passed into law.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Bill entitled, 'the Fiscal Management and Control Act, 2017, being an Act to provide for direction of Agencies of Government to transfer revenues and other moneys received by the Agencies into the consolidation fund and for other related matters, has been read the third time and passed into law]

THE REVENUE ADMINISTRATION ACT, 2017

INTRODUCTION AND FIRST READING

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MR MOMOH VANDI *[Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Development]:*

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, "The Revenue Administration Act, 2017 being an Act to provide for the Administration of Revenue Laws to avoid repetition and promote consistency by reconciling and reunifying the Administration of different revenue laws be read the first time.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Bill entitled the Revenue Administration Act, 2017 has been read the first]

SECOND READING

MR MOMOH VANDI: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, the Revenue Administration Act 2017 being an Act to provide for the Administration of Revenue Laws to avoid repetition and promote consistency for reconciling and unifying the Administration of different revenue laws be read the second time.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Bill entitle, 'the Revenue Administration Act 2017 is intended to provide for efficient and effective administration of revenue laws to avoid repetition and promote consistency by reconciling and unifying the administration of different revenue laws of the National Revenue Authority for other related matters.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Revenue Administration Act 2017 is divided into 15 parts with the fourth schedule having seven parts.

Part One

It provides the interpretation of certain terms and expression in the Bill.

Part Two

Provides for the rulings and practice note, give power to the Commissioner General to issue practice note in writing, setting out the Commissioner General interpretation of:

- a. the revenue law currently in force; and
- b. the amendment to the revenue law not yet in force.

Part Three

It provides for the administration of revenue laws that gives authority through the Commissioner General and its tax officers for the administration by giving effect of the revenue laws in accordance with the provision of the National Revenue Authority Act. The Authority must issue an identity card to every tax officer.

Part Four

It carries provision on tax payer's representation and tax advice. It further provides information and application for tax payers' identification number and that is the unique number assigned to a particular tax payer. It further provides for the timeframe for which a tax payer should submit application; i.e., 15 days of the commencement of an activity for action that give rise to the potential liability.

Part Five

It deals with the official language of communications and documentation. It includes that the English is the official language of the revenue laws and the language of communication. It gives power to the Commissioner General to refuse or recognise any communication of document that is not in official language.

Part Six

It deals with the intention and provision of information. It mandates tax payers to maintain documents whether in paper or in electronics.

Part Seven

It deals with assessment of tax that requires every tax payer to make self-assessment in their tax liability.

Part Eight

It deals with dispute resolution. It provides for tax payers who are dissatisfied by a tax decision to object the decision, otherwise the decision is final and conclusive, and not be disputed in any ground in any proceeding before a court or tribunal. It also provides for tax payers affected by an objection decision to appeal to the tax decision in the revenue review tribunal, established under Section 57. Section 57 will establish the revenue review tribunal for the purpose of hearing and determining appeals made.

Part Nine

This has to do with payment of taxes specifically. It provides for the time for the payment of tax, extension of time for paying tax, manner of paying tax, and order of paying tax.

Part Ten

This provides for recovery of unpaid tax. It also provides for the Commissioner-General to sue for recovery and pay taxes in any court of competent jurisdiction.

Part Eleven

It deals with remission and refund of tax. It provides for remission and refund of tax by tax payers over tax liabilities.

Part Twelve

This deals with interest and penalties. It provides for payment interest for underestimating tax payable and for failing for paying tax.

Part Thirteen

It deals with offences for failing to comply with revenue laws and failing to pay taxes.

Part Fourteen

This deals with tax recovery proceedings through power of search seizure and arrest.

Part Fifteen

This deals with transition and laws amended by this Act.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the schedule include the following:

first Schedule: Transaction for which tax payer identification number is required;

second Schedule: Tax return and assessments;

third Schedule: amendment of revenue laws; and

The fourth Schedule has five parts:

Part 1

Income tax Act, 2000.

Part 2

Goods and Services Act 2009

Part 3

Foreign travels, Ticket Tax Act, 1975.

Part 4

Payroll tax Act, 1972

Part 5

Excise Act, 1982.

Part 6

Custom Act, 2011

Part 7

The national Revenue Authority Act, 2002.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I move that the Bill entitled, 'The Revenue Administration Act, 2017 be read the second time.

[Question Proposed]

HON. ALHAJI SERAY DUMBUYA: Thank you, Mr Speaker for giving me this opportunity to contribute to this Bill. This Bill is about set of rules and regulations for the administration of revenue laws. It helps us consolidate our laws to make revenue collection effective. It also helps us, as parliamentarians, to increase our supervision and support for effective revenue administration. This Bill, if passed into law, it will increase revenue collection. The Bill helps us for easy consolidation of our payroll system and helps us to pay our employees efficiently and effectively. For our country to proceed, it has to meet its obligation to pay their employees.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Bill makes it easy for income tax collection. It facilitates the payment of our GST and makes it easy to manage our revenue and encourage our tax payers to pay their GST accurately and on time. As we are all aware, no country will survive without an effective system and tax collection is the back bone of a successful government which we have done, far different from previous governments.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Act further creates a forum for tax payers, representation and tax advice. We passed a Commission that will represent tax payers, so that they will be treated fairly. This set of laws put together by the Ministry helps us to consolidate our revenue and to be able to give account to the people. Our tax revenue system can only help the Government when it makes it efficient and effective. These laws will facilitate that process effectively.

On that note, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I rest my case to give chance to other Members of Parliament to make their contributions.

HON. ALHASSAN KAMARA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Bill in front of us is a Bill that gears towards strengthening our revenue collection authority and effecting some rules change into the existing laws that we currently have. Every member of this House will agree with me that our revenue laws of 2000, our goods and services Act, 2009 and some of the other laws we have in terms of

revenue mobilisation, have some problems. In that regard, that is why the Ministry of Finance thought it prudent to fine-tune our laws, so that we can bring it into proper standard.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, one of the problems we have in these laws is under declaration of goods. When importers import goods, they tend to falsify their declaration, thereby not mentioning the correct value of what is in their containers. This is why it is very difficult, as an income generation agency, to deal with such problems. So, what these laws do in term of penalties is to stipulate what should happen in the event such crimes take place. It makes it very clear, in the first instance, there should be a **200%** fine imposed; and if you are second or a repeat offender, penalties could go up to **300%**. Therefore, this is going to give more powers and to make clear rules that will enable Sierra Leone to generate the needed resources. So, I want to urge colleagues to speedily ratify this Bill. I thank you.

HON. HASSAN A. SESAY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I think the Bill before us makes a whole lot of sense because for any government to prosper, it needs to increase its tax base, so that government will be able to meet its commitments to people. We know very well that the commitments that government has are numerous at every point in time; and if a Bill of this nature that will consolidate our taxes comes to this House, we have to support it wholeheartedly. If this Bill is passed into law, it will enable government to put together the needed resources to run the state. It will also enable government to increase its performance at all levels.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to believe that if parliamentarians are here to seek the interest of the people of this country, this Bill is one that we must embrace and work towards ratifying as soon as possible, so that government's tax base is increased. We are all aware that there are lots of people who are finding ways to circumvent the payment of GST. This is because majority of us usually go to the supermarkets or stores; but because there has not been a comprehensive legislation to ensure that people are forced to pay GST to government, they tend to circumvent the payment of GST. I want to state here that these people are making a lot of profit from

us, but yet they are refusing to pay GST to government. This means that we are being cheated and the government is also being cheated because we ought to get receipts for all GST that we pay. In fact, very few institutions provide GST receipts to make us believe that they are paying to the NRA. If we take all those issues into consideration, it will help to close a lot of loopholes in the system.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have just passed a Bill about moneys coming to the CRF from all MDAs. We should also try to find ways and means of tackling seepages, i.e., ensuring that moneys that are misappropriated are paid back into the CRF. If a country fails to adjust its tax base, it will not meet its commitments to the people, such as paying salaries to employees. I want to believe that as the people's representatives, we must make sure that we put all our efforts together, so that we can collectively work towards closing those loopholes. This will enable the Government to increase the level of taxes and its commitments to the people of this country. Again, if the loopholes are closed, a lot of the wastages that are taking place within government institutions will be minimised. I think that is why we must always try to put laws in place to make our people comfortable.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to implore my colleagues to ensure that any Bill that has to do with financial prudence must be supported and passed into law. This is very important and that is why I am supporting this Bill. We must be seen supporting legislations that are in the best interest of the people. Government must increase its tax base, so that we get what is needed for the people. I want to make it loud and clear that the Government is not asking for more. What the government is asking for is what is due to government.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my colleague from Constituency 096 said that a lot of people undervalued their goods in order to invade tax. I want to add by saying that they are doing that in order to defraud the state. If we are to fight mispricing, then we have to support this Bill because it is meant to address such issue. I believe that this legislation will help us achieve something in that direction and that is why I want to support the ratification of this Bill. This Bill will help to ensure that government

increases its revenue base and which will also give the Government the capacity to do what they are supposed to be doing in terms of meeting its responsibilities.

With those few words, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to thank you very much for giving this opportunity.

HON. SIDIE M. TUNIS [*Acting Minority Leader of the House*]: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, what we have before us; i.e., the Revenue Administration Act, 2017 is a very important Bill. I will definitely not support the idea of just passing it hastily because this Bill is about the consolidation of so many other laws. Some of the laws go as far back as in 1972; like the Pay Roll Tax Act, 1972; Excise Act, 1982; and Foreign Travel Act, 1975. Therefore, these are very old laws, though some of them have been amended. We do not even know what is happening in this particular jurisdiction; therefore, we cannot just pass it in a hurry.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to call on Honourable Members to go back home and study this Bill, so that when we get to the Committee Stage, we will be in a better position to contribute. At the moment, a lot of Members of Parliament seated here do not even have the Bill. They have little or no knowledge of this particular Bill. Therefore, I want to appeal to all of you to go and read this Bill thoroughly.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, this Bill is about reconciling different revenue laws, which is very good. It is very good for us as a country to consolidate our laws. In my view, we have ensured robust laws for the NRA. There are so many laws we have passed in this House that will help the NRA to generate revenue on behalf of government. However, we are still lacking behind in terms of revenue generation. There are still areas in our revenue generation that may not have been touched on; for instance, the **10%** rent tax in this country. How many people are paying rent tax in this country? What is the NRA doing about collecting rent tax? We are always here, working very hard to ensure that we help government with necessary laws to improve on revenue generation. What is the NRA doing with the laws that are already being provided for them? Our revenue generation drive is very weak, as we speak because we have problem with our revenue generation ability.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am calling on Honourable Members to go back and read this Bill, so that whenever the Honourable Speaker decides to adjourn this House, you will be in a better position to contribute constructively to this Bill. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

HON. LEONARD S. FOFANAH: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have a lot of laws related to our tax system in this country. In other words, there are lots of tax laws relating to our tax system and these extant laws are the laws we have to deal with. There are investors and business people we have to deal with in terms of tax payment. The intention of this Bill is not merely amending all those very many laws, but to merely consolidate them and bring them under one law to make it simpler.

Suspension of S. O. 5[2]

HON. LEONARD S. FOFANAH: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, having said that you will agree with me, as the saying goes, 'necessity is the mother of invention.' This is because of the proliferation of these laws, tax payers are finding it extremely difficult and cumbersome to face the NRA tax system. That is why this Bill has been brought, so that we can consolidate all those extant and relevant laws under one single Act. This will make it easier for tax payers to pay.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Acting Minority Leader said that we are not necessarily amending those laws, but we are consolidating them so that they become simpler for implementation and tax system. The Honourable Acting Minority Leader also raised a specific issue about rent tax. You will agree with me that a lot of people here are landlords and that is the one specific tax regime that is extremely difficult to implement simply because landlords do not want to pay that particular tax. A lot of tenants want to pay direct, as the law stipulates, but immediately you raise that issue, you will be given notice to quit the landlord's house. The landlord will tell you that he/she is paying taxes and that you should not worry about that. So, that provision in the law, whereby the tenant is empowered to pay direct, is never implemented because the landlords are extremely unreasonable. They do not want to pay the Government tax

and the NRA cannot effectively monitor that particular tax regime. That is the problem we have with that particular tax system, Mr Speaker.

Notwithstanding that, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we want to consolidate all the laws, so that it will be easier for people to follow. There is no need for people to go back and study those laws because like I have said, we are not necessarily debating those laws to make amendments to them or to increase the tax system under their regime. We merely want to consolidate, so that all the laws are brought together; and that will be easier in terms of reading and obeying those tax laws.

Having said that, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to state that this Bill is non-controversial. We can pass this Bill today, but where there is need to make amendment in future, we can always come back and amend those relevant sections of the law. As of now, the NRA merely want to have a consolidated Act, so that making references to the law you will not need to go to several sources to consult those laws. I want to call on my colleagues to speedily ratify this Bill. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

MR MOMOH VANDI: Mr Speaker Honourable Members, let me again thank Honourable Members for their respective contributions. I move that the Bill entitled, 'Revenue Administration Act, 2017' being an Act to provide for the administration of revenue laws to avoid repetition and promote consistency by reconciling and unifying the administration of different revenue laws be read the second time.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Bill entitled, the Revenue Administration Act, 2017 has been read second time]

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I am forced to adjourn this sitting instead of proceeding to the Committee Stage.

ADJOURNMENT

[The House rose at 12.20 p.m. and was adjourned to Wednesday, 11th October, 2017 at 10 .00 a.m.]