

'Ridiculous change'

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*Biman Prasad (left) Tupou Draunidalo and Aseri Radrodro (back) leave Parliament yesterday. **Picture:** JONA KONATACI*

CHANGES in Standing Orders for petitions to be voted on in Parliament before being referred to a standing committee, curtails the views of the people to be heard in Parliament, says the Opposition.

Under recent **amendments** to the Standing Orders, petitions will no longer be automatically referred to the relevant standing committees by the Speaker.

Yesterday there was extensive discussion of the effect the new amendments would have on the freedom of speech.

National Federation Party leader Professor Biman Prasad said the amendments were a "ridiculous change".

"With government having a majority in Parliament and in Standing Committees, these important petitions will be voted out," Prof Prasad said.

He said in a democratic system, people's voices through its elected members of Parliament should be heard.

NFP MP Roko Tupou Draunidalo said whether petitions were accepted or not, it should be referred to Standing Committees.

SODELPA MP Salote Radrodro said Parliament was disallowing Fijians to voice their concerns.

Tourism Minister Faiyaz Koya said the debate on the matter was wasting Parliament's time.

Standing Order 37 (5) states that "following the presentation of a petition by a member, the member must move a motion that Parliament vote on whether the petition is to be referred to the standing committee under which the subject matter of the petition falls".

Section 37(5) of the Standing Orders requires a minimum of 40 per cent support for the petition to be referred to the relevant standing committee.