
THE

House of Assembly Debates

(OFFICIAL REPORT)

FIRST SESSION 2003 – 2008

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, October 19, 2004

Pursuant to the adjournment, the House of Assembly met at 10.15 a.m. on Tuesday, October 19, 2004.

PRESENT

His Honour I. A. ROETT, G.C.M. B.A., Dip. Ed. (Speaker)

His Honour J. M. EDGHILL, J.P. (Deputy Speaker)

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND, B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed., LL.B. (Hons.), L.E.C., J.P. (Minister of Labour and Social Security)

Hon. G. A. CLARKE, B.Sc., Dip. Ed., J.P. (Minister of Public Works and Transport)

Hon. R. D. MARSHALL (Chairman of Committees)

Hon. H. F. LASHLEY (Minister of Social Transformation)

Mr. R. St. C. TOPPIN, LL.B.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON, LL.B. (Minister of Housing, Lands and the Environment)

Mr. T. A. PRESCOD, B.A.

Rev. J. J. S. ATHERLEY, B.A., B.Sc., J.P. (Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney General and Minister of Home Affairs)

Hon. A. P. WOOD, B.Sc., M.Sc., M.Phil., J.P. (Minister of Energy and Public Utilities)

Hon. R. R. FARLEY, B.Sc., J.P. (Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports)

Hon. Miss C. Y. FORDE, J.P. (Minister of State, Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports)

Hon. J. X. WALCOTT, M.B., B.S., F.R.C.S. (Edin.), J.P. (Minister of Health)

Mr. R. D. JONES, B.A. (Hons.), M.A. (Ed.), J.P.

Dr. D. C. ESTWICK, B.Sc., M.B., B.S.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL, B.Sc. (Econ.) (Hons.), M.A. (Public Finance), (Leader of the Opposition)

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL, LL.B. (Hons.), L.E.C. (Minister of Industry and International Business)

Mr. M. A. LASHLEY, LL.B. (Hons.)

Hon. K. D. SYMMONDS, B.A., LL.B. (Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade)

Dr. W. F. DUGUID, B.D.S. (Comm.), F.D.S., FDRCS, J.P.

Mr. R. L. SEALY, B.Sc., M.B.A.

Prayers were taken by Canon Father Ivan Harewood.

Mr. SPEAKER: The House is now in session.

MINUTES

Mr. SPEAKER: The Minutes of Tuesday, October 12, 2004.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes for the Honourable the House of Assembly for its meeting of Tuesday, October 12, 2004, which Minutes have been circulated, be taken as read.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: I beg to second that, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: If there are no corrections or observations, then let those Minutes stand confirmed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY HIS HONOUR THE SPEAKER

Mr. SPEAKER: I am to report to this Honourable House that I am in receipt of the Accounts and Statements for the month of April 2004 from the Accountant-General.

PAPERS

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the acting Minister of Home Affairs and Honourable Member for St. Michael West, I am commanded to lay the Barbados Citizenship (Amendment) Regulations, 2004.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that Standing Orders Nos. 6, 16, 18, 20, 42(5), 43 and 44 be suspended for the rest of this day's Sitting.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: I beg to second that.

The question was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 3 – RESOLUTION TO TAKE NOTE OF
THE GREEN PAPER ENTITLED “TOWARDS A
SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES – A NATIONAL
POLICY ON AGEING”
(RESUMPTION)

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the laying of this Green Paper and Resolution asking this Honourable House to take note and approve this National Policy on Ageing with the very meaningful and attractive caption “Towards A Society for All Ages”.

Indeed, Sir, the level of development within a society stands to be judged not merely by the quality and architectural appeal of its monuments and various buildings, not merely by the quality and extensiveness of its physical infrastructure, its roads, its telecommunications and other physical attributes, but how it treats its people, particularly the elderly, children and the vulnerable groups in the society, whether they be the poor, the disabled or other groups.

Sir, the fact that we in Barbados are moving towards a population profile which mirrors that of a developed country, that is, where an increasing proportion of our population is over the age of 50, is first of all a tribute to the systems we have put in place in the past to allow people to so have a quality of life as would enable longevity as well as providing us with both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity being that of making use of the tremendous talent which is reposed in these senior citizens and the challenge is that of dealing with some of the issues relating to housing and to the financial stability of these seniors and things of that nature.

Sir, let us not fool ourselves. There are other countries

in the world, some of which are better resourced financially in terms of natural resources and in terms of the diversity of the natural environment that have not been able to evolve social arrangements such as have permitted their citizens to have a long life. For a number of citizens in various countries in the world, life is still very brutish and short. Therefore, we need to look at those attributes which have caused us, as a society, to have an age profile which almost exactly mirrors that of Norway which is listed as the number one country in the Human Development Index.

What has that been, Sir? This country and this society took a decision over the years to make education and health the principal areas of spending. Therefore, it is to the credit of this country that notwithstanding changes in political administrations over the years and notwithstanding changes in our technical advisors and our technical experts in the private sector that the focus on building social capital has continued.

Indeed, Sir, if one were to examine the factors which have caused this small country, slim of natural resources, to be able to boast not just longevity but very high per capita income, one would recognise that one of those factors has been the strength of our social capital. Indeed, the strength of that social capital has been one of the principal contributors to our ability to get out of economic downturns from time to time. The strength of that social capital has also resulted in a society which, despite its diversity, has been a model of cohesiveness.

Therefore, Sir, we need to build on those inherent strengths to make sure that as we have this ageing population that we make every effort to fully involve these senior citizens in all aspects of national development. These seniors are a very valuable resource. They are repositories of our traditions, of our Barbadian culture, of tremendous knowledge and indeed great skill. You can take any senior citizen in any given area of work, whether it be in carpentry, in engineering, in human resource management or in journalism, and when you consider sometimes 40 or 50 years of accumulated experience of wide and varied training, you consider the valuable resource which you have.

10.30 a.m.

Our capacity to build social capital such as would allow us to withstand economic and social shocks in the future, will depend on whether or not we are able to tap into the vast wealth of knowledge and experience of our seniors today, to help our young people to have a focus and, indeed, have the tools for life which would help them as they go through what we hope for them, would be a long and prosperous life.

Sir, I want, first of all, to identify some of the issues in the Green Paper, as well as to make suggestions how we can even better make some use of these seniors in our

community. I want to applaud the drafters of the Green Paper for the comprehensive approach which they have taken in this matter of ageing. Many persons take a one-dimensional approach. People may look exclusively at the area of health, on the assumption that perhaps all seniors do is to become unhealthy and, therefore, health is the principal issue. Some persons take a one-dimensional look at the matter by dealing with the challenge of housing, on the assumption that elderly persons end up being abandoned and homeless, though some do, not all. Others will take the one-dimensional view relating to the matter of income security, as if seniors are, by definition poor, which might not be the case.

This Green Paper, to its credit, takes a comprehensive approach and recognises that we need to address the issue of the law in terms of any deficiencies which allow our seniors to be exploited, and to plug those loopholes. It looks at the way we build our physical infrastructure, whether they be our roads, sidewalks or office buildings, to ensure that there is access. It looks at the matter of age discrimination, which I think is important because there is a particular period in a person's life, that can be particularly difficult.

There are reports that when persons are over the age of 45 and 50 and have to be involved in career changes, sometimes there is not always great enough sensitivity in the workplace, that on the part of some employers, there is a preference for young employees, not because these young persons may have better skills but because employers may believe that they may be able to pay them a lower wage because they have now begun working.

Mr. Speaker, we need to make sure that by way of education and exposure and by legislation where that is applicable, it might become necessary to ensure that persons are not discriminated against, merely because of their age because this would be counterproductive to our whole thrust to make sure the society is able to benefit from the presence of these seniors in our community.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of that broad approach, I want to speak briefly to a number of positive things that are happening in relation to our seniors. A 1995 report coming out of the Barbados Statistical Service, indicated that of the number of persons who had done voluntary work with organisations and various components within the community, that one-quarter of those persons were over the age of 65. Indeed, whether it be through the Barbados Association for Retired Persons (BARP), in churches across Barbados, sporting groups, cultural groups, the Arts or in education, one can see the presence of a number of these very distinguished and experienced seniors giving guidance.

Mr. Speaker, according to that 1995 report, such were the number of seniors involved over the 12-month period the report covered, that according to their calculation, those

seniors contributed over 14.1 million hours of voluntary work during that 12-month period. Sir, that gives some indication of the magnitude of the consideration but the report has not dealt with the quality of the contribution which they have made.

Mr. Speaker, we need only to look at the recent success of our senior athletes at the world games. They were excellent and outstanding. We need only to look at the dramatic productions of the group of seniors called the Golden Girls, under the auspices of the National Assistance Board, where every year, they put on a wonderful dramatic production.

Sir, as you know, a dramatic production does not happen overnight. It is as a result of planning, training, and preparation. We have only to look at the support network which works in support of our children's homes and our senior citizens' homes, to see the presence of these volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, their work is also seen, and this part is not voluntary, they are paid, but there are hundreds of senior citizens who are engaged by the Ministry of Education, to do a number of things in the educational field such as invigilating examination for the Caribbean Examination Council examinations and other examination bodies. A number of retired persons work in our Continuing Education Programme where, for example, at St. James Secondary, Springer Memorial, Foundation School, and the Lester Vaughn School, classes are offered in the night for persons who want to do Caribbean Examination Council examinations. Therefore, across-the-board, our seniors are actively involved.

There are others who are involved in exploring the world. They are members of travel clubs and travel circles and in their retirement, are not at home rusting out. They are getting to do some of those interesting, fun and adventurous things that they were not able to do while raising families, earning income and having commitments to their jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that there is still more that can be done. Through the Youth Affairs section of the Ministry of Education, we intend to insure that as part of the activities, whether it is within the Barbados Youth Service or the Youth Development Programme, that we twin our young people with our senior citizens, to ensure that there is a passing on of values, culture and traditions because there is much to be learned from these older persons.

Mr. Speaker, as a young man growing up, I learnt much from staying on the sidelines. As you know in those days, children were supposed to be seen and not heard. Children could not go into the midst of a conversation and

look into the mouth of a senior while that senior was speaking. That was deemed to be rude. It is not so these days.

In those days I would stand on the sideline and hear old stories of things that happened in the riots; what were the conditions that people lived under; what happened in Hurricane Janet; strategies employed as people sought to rebuild their lives, so shattered by that natural disaster; of the political and social activities associated with the Federation, and Barbados' part in it and how it affected the ordinary man, or about what happened at Independence.

Sir, when taken together, there is a lot of transfer of knowledge and experience, in terms of how our seniors, many of whom with not much by way of economic earnings, were able to maintain a family; were able to establish for themselves housing; were able to pass on values to their children and grand-children, such as would make them prominent persons in Barbados today.

10.40 a.m.

We have also indicated to principals at schools that as part of their regular programming that they need to invite older persons in the community to share their life experiences to be part of the mentoring process.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to lament the fact that much of the oral history, traditions and culture which, at this time reside only in the minds of seniors, are passing on at their death because there has not been enough collection and publication of the cultural history and traditions of Barbados.

Sir, there is light at the end of the tunnel because a number of historians have devoted themselves to look at these areas and to talk to persons like Mr. Graham Nurse from Silver Sands who is the oldest, most successful fisherman from Christ Church who was fishing from the age of 13 and is now in his early eighties.

Sir, I must also give credit to the *Nation News* because they have identified and used their publication to look at the culture, districts and the lives of ordinary people in Barbados. Sir, very often we hear of the history and traditions of Barbados and the games that were played 50 years ago from the mouths of seniors in our community.

Mr. Speaker, in Barbados we have not done a good enough job in terms of the formal transmission of that knowledge. Sir, my fear is that if we do not do more publishing, produce more video work and actively identify this as a priority for our researchers and the university that, over time, we could lose much of our history.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of our Barbadian vernacular, it is a wonderful and joyous thing to hear a good story being related in a strong Barbadian accent or good old Bajan with words like 'wunna' which means all of you and which, according to Richard Allsopp who produced the Dictionary of Caribbean language, are words that stretch back to Africa and are not corruption of English words. Sir, in many of these older Barbadians, you find the roots of the Barbadian language. They use words like 'wallaw' and in the Barbadian tradition of storytelling, the sound of the word gives some hint to its meaning so that when a fellow falls you would hear the word 'bradam'.

Mr. Speaker, you are an expert in language and I am sure you understand that we need to make full use of this excellent resource in order to ensure the maintenance of cultural norms and values and to understand our language system and things of that nature.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the economic aspect of things, I want to say that this Government has been proactive and has launched a number of initiatives to put our seniors in a better position to provide for themselves financially into the future. Sir, it was this administration that looked at ensuring a proper safety net for our seniors recognising that they are earners, that they can work and are not retired. Sir, in Barbados retirement means ending your formal relationship with your principal employer thus triggering your rights to your pension benefit. It does not mean that you quit the workforce because people can go on to do other things.

Sir, after my father reached his retirement age at 65 and was getting his pension, he went to work at the same workplace until at the age 73, on his own accord, he decided that after 60 years in his field he no longer wanted to get up daily to go to work. Sir, because of his skills and ability, he was given the option to work and to stop working at his own discretion. This is the case with several of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the package of financial and economic incentives that have to be put in place should take into account seniors who are in financial trouble, who have no income or support from family and, therefore, require the support of the State as well as those seniors who have access to pension and are able to work and support themselves and their family.

10.50 a.m.

Sir, in relation to the safety net, let us not forget that over the last 10 years there has been a steady increase in the level of pensions. When there were adjustments in wages for government employees, the Government adjusted the non-contributory pensions. Sir, with the change being made, rather than those non contributory pensions being a drain on the National Insurance Fund, they are now being paid from the resources of the Ministry of Finance.

Over the last ten years of this Administration, there has been considerable assistance going to senior citizens who are in need of housing support. I do not have the figure here but I am sure when the Honourable Minister wraps up this debate he will be able to give an idea of the number of senior citizens who were saved from having to pull their pockets to fix a roof, replace siding boards and to add toilets and baths to their homes. Sir, those are strong economic and fiscal measures. It is not only the size of the pension but it is saving our seniors from having to spend on those matters.

For example, through the Urban Development Commission, I was humbled at having the opportunity to facilitate, by way of making the formal request and ensuring that the job was done, where there were three seniors, a blind man approximately 65, his wife age 68 and the wife's mother who was in her 90s. In those circumstances none of those three persons had access to indoor bathroom facilities. Mr. Speaker, whether it was night or day, rain or sun they had to make their way across the yard to use their convenience. Sir, through the programme of Poverty Alleviation, which was criticised by some of the misguided in this society, we were able to allow those seniors to live with some measure of dignity. Sir, that is just an example. Those are the lived experiences of our citizens in terms of the support coming from this Administration. Of course, there is still more to be done.

The reality is, prior to this Administration assuming office, none of this used to be done. We start from the fact where we have thousands of seniors who need help but it is obvious that the needs of the thousands of citizens would not be done in one fell swoop. We are aware of the assistance that has been provided and we are also aware what is still to be done.

Sir, if it is true that by their fruit we should know them, then our fruits have clearly shown to those persons who are still waiting to get their assistance that it will be done. That has been a very strong measure. It is not a pension but it is a direct economic contribution.

Mr. Speaker, for example digging a well may cost between \$1,800.00 or \$2,000.00; adding a bathroom, depending on the work to be done, could cost between \$8,000.00 and \$10,000.00; changing a roof and fixing siding boards are direct economic inputs. Apart from those who would need that safety net support, the Government has also recognised that we need to help people while they are still working to plan for their retirement. Therefore, the legislation, programmes and incentives relating to registered retirement saving plans, encourage people who are at the peak of their earning power to plan but also recognising that there was an abuse of our National Insurance system by some who, by way of their professions, we knew that they were working and earning good wages, and were not paying

national insurance when they were working but were drawing national insurance when they retired. Sir, that loophole has been plugged.

Mr. Speaker, there is a balance whereby a safety net is provided for those that are in need and providing financial incentives so that those who are earning handsomely, while in their working years, can use those earnings to support themselves at the end of their working lives.

Sir, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy came late but I will give him a recap of...

Asides.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: I was not unaware of what was going on in this Honourable House. The Honourable Member has forgotten that you can now follow these debates by way of the Press.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member forgot that you can only be listening to the radio outside of the Chamber. We are not allowed to have radios and cell phones, *et cetera* in this Honourable House. The Honourable Member could only have been out of the Chamber while the Honourable House was in session.

Mr. SPEAKER: Please, conclude, Sir.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: I want to support the broad policies as announced in this document and I look forward to the Ministry of Social Transformation, persons in the private sector and the civil society pressing forth with the works by moving these proposals to reality so that we can have a prosperous, successful and happy society for all ages.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. Michael North West.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a contribution in this debate respecting that the Green Paper intends to be comprehensive but there are four basic needs for the ageing. There are housing, food, clothing and health. While I appreciate the intention of the Green Paper, any Government must, in fact, seek to take care of these needs. I am concerned that over the last seven years, in particular, that pensioners are materially not better off in Barbados and I will demonstrate this.

Sir, the contributory pensioners receive increases that are commensurate with increases of public servants but non-contributory pensioners do not receive adjustments similar to public servants' increases over the years.

However, I want to demonstrate that while the unions in Barbados have been using the cost of living as a basis for salary increases, and by extension increases in pensions for Barbadians, the profile of the pensioner does suggest that he or she spends increasingly more on food and more than the average Barbadian would spend on food needs. It therefore, means that pensioners are not better off and I need to demonstrate fully to this Government.

Sir, since 1997 food prices in Barbados, according to the official Cost of Living Index, have increased by almost 25 per cent, that is the food category. I am not talking about the overall index. I am speaking specifically to the food category. Mr. Speaker, when we look at the wage negotiations since that period, it could average over 20 per cent. It therefore means in real terms, given the extent to which a pensioner spends his or her income on food, and it would be proportionately more, that one could see the difficulty a pensioner would have undergone in the last seven years.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, in recent times, the food component accounts for about 14 per cent of the expenditure of the average household. That has now been reduced to the most recent index, nevertheless it is still the most significant component of a household's expenditure.

Sir, I want to reiterate that a pensioner or an individual would spend more than the average that a household would spend on food. It would be about 60 per cent or more. That is so because a pensioner's life is more restricted, the income is less and they are going to concentrate on the basics. They are not going to be out partying, going to dub fetes or to major social events. The focus of the pensioner is on survival. Therefore, the extent to which he spends his income would be determined by issues pertaining to being adequately fed, health care and housing. It is therefore important to note that fact.

Mr. Speaker, if you want evidence of what I am saying, you only need to go and read the newsletter of the *Barbados Economic Society* to see that this same point was made that while you can average households incomes and average the expenditure on food, it in fact differs.

Mr. Speaker, that is a direct consequence of economic theory that low income people consume proportionately more of their income on food and basic needs. For example, a black belly sheep would eat the same amount of rice, potatoes and meat as a cow in Barbados. So it should be very clear that being richer does not mean that you would eat more rice or potatoes. Therefore, the proportion of a richer person's income spent on food would be much less than a much poorer person. That is the point that I wish to make.

I think all Honourable Members in here can recognise my point.

Mr. Speaker, there is an even greater concern now. In today's world we are all now in a period when oil prices are increasing substantially. Therefore, we can anticipate that an increase in oil prices will have an inflationary impact in Barbados and will push up the cost of food even more. This would take a little time to happen, but I suspect that it has already started to happen in Barbados where the impact of oil prices is starting to feed its way into the food prices in Barbados because imported food prices will go higher as well.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to caution the trade unions on this matter because they have already signed a three-year agreement with the Government with respect to public sector wages. If I recall correctly, in 2003 public sector workers were given a wage increase of two per cent, they received a three per cent increase in 2004 and in 2005 they will receive a further three per cent. I wish to caution the trade unions because it is quite clear that over the next year and a half prices will skyrocket in Barbados as a result of the tremendous increases in oil prices and other things that I will refer to later. Therefore, while the trade unions have already locked themselves in to that wage increase, I suspect that by next year the increases in prices would exceed the negotiated position of three per cent that has already been agreed to in 2003. This has implications for old aged pensioners because as I said at the start of my presentation old aged pensioners' pensions are linked directly to public sector wage increases, therefore you can anticipate some fallout in terms of their purchasing power.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, with the potential threat of inflation, caused by oil prices, it ought to be very clear at this stage that there will be an increase in water rates and bus fares in Barbados in the not too distant future. It is just a matter of time. So you can see the impact that would have on old aged pensioners who are already experiencing erosion of their incomes because they spend proportionately more on food than they do with respect to other categories within the cost of living index. So I am sending a warning to Barbadians that they will be an increase in bus fares and water rates in the not too distant future. You only need to check the International Monetary Fund documents and the kite flying that has occurred by Ministers of this Administration and you would see that there is...

Hon. K. D. SYMMONDS: On a point of order. It is always with much reluctance that one interrupts the Leader of the Opposition when he is in full flight but he is clearly misleading the House. We are in the middle of a debate on the elderly and he is speaking to the question of bus fares and water rates neither of which are imposts against the elderly. If the Leader of the Opposition is so disconnected from reality on the ground we will be more than happy to educate him as to the bills the elderly are called upon to

pay. He must not use this debate as an opportunity to grandstand and misrepresent facts.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Speaker, I said from the outset that this Green Paper intends to be comprehensive but that there are four basic needs of the aged in Barbados. Those needs are food, shelter, clothing and health. I am therefore saying that any comprehensive policy on the part of Government would need to address these four basic needs. In fact, because of the proportion of their income spent on food, old aged pensioners have already suffered a reduction in their purchasing power over the last seven years in Barbados because the increases in their contributory pensions have not outstripped the growth of food prices over the last seven years, and nobody can fault that.

I am therefore saying that in light of the prevailing circumstances with respect to the oil market and the potential impact on all kinds of prices there will in fact be an increase in prices on almost every item in Barbados. This would be compounded by the fact that we can anticipate that water rates and bus fares will go up in the not too distant future.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying to you that there is evidence within documents from the International Monetary Fund that Government has been posturing on this issue for quite a while. There is evidence that Ministers have been flying kites with respect to whether bus fares and water rates would be increased.
11.10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am, therefore, saying that, in fact, we can anticipate further erosion of the standard of living of old aged pensioners and furthermore, of the standard of living of all Barbadians within the next six to twelve months. Whoever on That Side wants to deny it can argue their position but it is very evident that, in fact, that is so.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen that the implications are grave in terms of meeting the basic needs of pensioners. Sir, I now go to the issue of housing. Again in Barbados, it is quite evident that housing has been a problem under this Administration and that over the last decade this Administration has failed to deliver a comprehensive housing programme.

Mr. Speaker, even in situations where this Administration has had opportunities to give old aged pensioners a chance to own their own homes, as in the case of the National Housing Corporation's units, rather than pass on benefits to old aged pensioners, ensuring that they have access to these units at reasonable cost, this Administration has, in fact, over-valued and over-priced those National Housing Corporation's units in areas such as the Farm Housing Area; Pine Housing Area; Gall Hill Housing Area;

Eden Lodge and Church Village, when in fact, those pensioners could have been given greater opportunity. I wish now, therefore, to explain my position.

Hon. A. P. WOOD: On a point of order. I did not want to intervene while the Honourable Member was speaking but when the Honourable Member is stating that the units are over-valued and over-priced, the Honourable Member is deliberately trying to mislead this Honourable House in the interest of making some political mileage.

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The units were not over-valued or over-priced but were valued in the normal way. The offer price to those who occupy them was given at a significant discount in the region of 25 or 30 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, there is also a rebate of \$100 per year for a maximum of 25 years which is given to those tenants. Therefore, I want to state for the record of this Honourable Chamber, that those units were valued in the acceptable manner and that the offer price was about 30 per cent below those corrected valuations, which were added to the rebates.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Speaker, I am exceedingly happy that the Honourable Member for St. Philip South has, in fact, introduced that to this Parliament because I now wish to explain why they were over-valued.

We are talking about housing for old aged pensioners and the opportunity that Government had to enfranchise the old aged pensioners of Barbados with the proposed sale of the National Housing units. We have a situation in which the Land Acquisition Act allows Government to acquire houses. Any acquired house is valued at market value.

I am going to suggest that \$50 000 for a unit in the Farm Housing Area, which is the market value that has been offered, will then be depreciated at 2 per cent per annum because a house, even within the Land Acquisition Act, is given a life span of 50 years.

Hon. K. D. SYMMONDS: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition may not wish to whisper. Even though he said he knows the Standing Orders now, apparently he did not know them before but there has to be a rule which is followed about relevance. This is not relevant. It is not germane to the debate.

Sir, with respect, by his own admission, the Leader of the Opposition has said during the same speech that the old aged pensioners spend all their money on food. Now he is trying to lead this Honourable House to believe that they are buying houses.

This is not relevant or germane. A housing debate will come and if the Honourable Member has a contribution to make about housing, we will hear him then but it can hardly be proper...

Asides.

Hon. K. D. SYMMONDS: He said they are not buying anything other than food.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order, please.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Speaker, I wish to establish that there are many old aged pensioners in the National Housing Corporation's units across Barbados and they are being given the opportunity to purchase their homes. I wish to suggest that these units are over-valued, and I wish to suggest this because of my understanding of the Land Acquisition Act.

Mr. Speaker, in the case of those old aged pensioners living in housing units such as those in the Farm Housing Area, the Pine Housing Area, and at Gall Hill Housing, Area, we could have given them the opportunity to purchase these units. In fact, when land and houses are acquired, they are valued at market value and even if one were to put a \$50 000 market value on a unit in the Farm Housing Area, it then has to be depreciated by the length of time it was built.

Mr. Speaker, if it is depreciated at 2 per cent, then 2 per cent of \$50 000 is \$1 000 per year. Therefore, a unit in the Farm Housing Area that is almost 40 years old, should have benefitted from a \$40 000 discount as a result of depreciation. This, therefore, brings the unit within the reach of the old aged pensioner and would, therefore, give the old aged pensioner a chance to own houses across the length and breadth of Barbados, in the same vein that we are now hearing that Government is proposing to build a \$50 000 house for young persons.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, a 40-year old house should have depreciated by \$40 000, if currently valued at \$50 000, and I am suggesting that we should have had a situation in Barbados where old aged pensioners should have received their units in those established estates, at far less than what Government has proposed to offer. Sir, nobody can dispute that. It is not just a question of style, we deserve to have some substance when it comes to politics in Barbados. That is precisely what I am suggesting here, that there should be a position.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order, please.

Hon. A. P. WOOD: Mr. Speaker, I do not enjoy doing what I am doing but sitting here listening to the Honourable

Member for St. Michael North West using this very simplistic approach to the devaluation of housing, he would want all of us to believe that those houses were built 50 years ago, and that over the years the Democratic Labour Party would not have spent any money on them to maintain them. Therefore, if no money at all would have been spent on those units ... to replace the value or portions of the depreciated amount over the fifty years, I would agree with him. I am saying that the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West is not giving us the full picture and should include in his analysis the total amount of money spent by his administration and by our administration in maintaining those houses during the 50 years.
11.20 a.m.

Mr. SPEAKER: This debate is not about a particular point made by either Honourable Member. I would suggest that we do not labour on any methods of calculation because the debate before the House is not about that. Please let us proceed.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Speaker, I am not dealing with any methodology but with the principle. I am saying that this was a prime opportunity to give the old aged pensioners of Barbados the right to own their own homes and that this is consistent with the wishes expressed in the Green Paper. Mr. Speaker, old age persons ought to be able to satisfy their basic needs and that includes housing.

Sir, the question of health is another major issue for old aged pensioners. In all fairness to the present Minister, we have seen the deterioration of health standards in Barbados over the last ten years and also the deterioration in the administration at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. It is quite clear that the method of putting a coat of paint on the wall and doing cosmetic work like putting a fencing around the hospital, that while it is good for the aesthetic value, will not improve administration of health services in Barbados.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, this Resolution is not about the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The Resolution before you is clear.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health spoke about health last week *ad nauseam* in this Resolution.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, I am suggesting that if you have to refer to a Ministry that it is allowed but you have to make a connection to the Resolution before the House.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Speaker, are we suggesting that there is no connection between the delivery

of health care in Barbados and old aged pensioners? I am saying that old aged pensioners require even more health care than the average Barbadian because of their age. Sir, old aged pensioners represent 60 per cent of admissions at Queen Elizabeth Hospital and, therefore, health care delivery has to be a major component of ageing. Sir, the point was made by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition last week that health care delivery must be a major part of the elderly in Barbados. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it must be of concern if we are not getting the message right with respect to the delivery of health care, and the administration of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the overall performance of our health sector in Barbados. Sir, no one can fault linking the deterioration in health care delivery with the ageing process in Barbados. In fact, there are several instances in Barbados where concerns have been raised with respect to such services.

Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the intent of the Green Paper to be comprehensive and wide-ranging, I also understand that there are basic needs which have to be met by the ageing within our society. These basic needs would also constitute part of the policy framework of the Government of Barbados because we cannot only be thinking in terms of the big picture but to take care of the nitty-gritty which impacts on the health of the ageing, like diet and nutrition.

Mr. Speaker, I am suggesting that we have to look at some of the major policy developments more closely rather than be concerned only with the bigger picture.

Mr. Speaker, the question of adequate clothing for the elderly is extremely vital. I have said before that if there is one thing in which a poor man takes pride, it is his clothing. This is why, in Barbados, when you invite a millionaire and a poor man to a wedding, you cannot distinguish on the basis of dress who is the richer of the two. Sir, Barbadians are known to be very conscious about appearance and their manner of dress and this is why when poor Barbadians are invited to a function which is considered to be in the upper echelons, they go the extra mile to put on the appropriate hat and gear to have the appropriate appearance.

Therefore, for the elderly it is absolutely vital that they not only be able to take care of the needs in the household but that when they are dressed to go out, that they look the part. Sir, a lot of emphasis is placed on this and, therefore, another area of basic need would be clothing. We have to be concerned that this area does not spiral out of the reach of the average pensioner and that he or she has the appearance befitting someone who has made an outstanding contribution to this country.

Mr. Speaker, no one can fault the Minister. In fact, the Minister needs to be lauded for being able to target this area

because of the outstanding contribution that pensioners would have made to the development of Barbados. We were made to believe that each area of policy had worked to the benefit of the old aged pensioners in Barbados because the evidence does not support the belief that old aged pensioners are better off ten years later than they were in 1994. In fact, all the evidence would especially point to non-contributory old aged pensioners who do not get increases commensurate with public sector wage increases and would have witnessed a deterioration in their spending power and, consequently, a deterioration in their standard of living.

11.30 a.m.

Sir, we understand that there is an attempt to curb workers incomes in Barbados. If we curb workers incomes further, it means that the opportunity for the extended family to take care of the elderly would also be compromised. We have, therefore, to look at the broader picture with respect to incomes because we know that we may be in a position to extend assistance to our older family or even others within the constituencies but if our incomes are, unfortunately, curbed further, then the potential to do so would be restricted. Therefore, I am saying that even looking at the protection or the preservation of the elderly in Barbados, we also have to be concerned about family incomes and not just the income of the pensioner because there are also other basic needs that would also be met by the extended family or close family in the upkeep of elderly persons in Barbados.

In fact, we know that unless drugs are on the formulary, those kinds of drugs would have to be bought by the extended family in order to upkeep those family members who need the drugs, especially non-generic drugs, and, therefore, it becomes a burden to the family income and not just the income of the pensioner.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that this debate may appear to be confined by a Green Paper but the reality is, ageing is a process that starts from youth. Ageing is a process that starts while you are at work. Ageing is a process that you prepare for during your working years. Ageing is a process that you can anticipate because you would like to experience the fullest life there is and, therefore, you cannot wait until ageing comes upon you to prepare for it. This is precisely the point that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition made last week when he was suggesting that we cannot wait until people have aged to take care of their health. Sir, we have to be more concerned about their preparation towards the process. That was the point that was being made last week by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and it was a very valid point.

Sir, you cannot wait until you are 65 years old to start jogging. In fact, I feel that a lot of what we are experiencing in Barbados is as a result of persons who may not be satisfied with the way in which they are ageing and then decide to become athletes by walking around the Garrison

Savannah and do a lot extensive physical work. In fact, if you do that as a young person you stand to benefit more from that exercise when you age than when you decide to become a fitness freak at age 60.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member has one more minute.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: Sir, I conclude that while I understand the Green Paper's intent, it is comprehensive that ultimately taking care of the aged is about taking care of four basic needs, food, housing, clothing and health.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. George North.

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, I want to look at the National Policy of Ageing. I believe that the opportunity should be taken at this time to look at the Green Paper, not as a document cast in stone but as a document for the wider society to discuss and put their views to the Government. I also believe that the Leader of the Opposition has missed the opportunity to set forth what he believes should be a national policy. That is why this document is called The National Policy on Ageing. It is not an opportunity to criticise past administrations of what happened in the past or to criticise this Administration.

Sir, we are saying that this is an opportunity, brought by the Honourable Minister, to look at how we will treat the elderly in our society now and in the future. I believe that criticising the Government and saying that the cost of living has increased in the last ten years, I do not believe that this should be the route to take because we are here to discuss a policy of a segment of a population that is ageing. We are saying that, from 65 and over, this segment of the population is increasing faster than in any period of our history. Therefore, a policy should be put in place to help the elderly.

Sir, it is true that the elderly usually consume a greater proportion of our health services because the majority of people who are in the government hospitals are over the age of 50 years. Sir, the Minister of Health pointed out last week that there are many elderly persons in our health facilities who need shelter.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point that as a Government and a people we have to ask ourselves the question whether workers should provide for their retirement or should it be the responsibility only of Government. I think that from the comment made by the Leader of the Opposition and from the Opposition spokesperson, who have spoken so far, it seems to me that they are saying that Government must provide for all workers.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is an opportunity for us to set in train at this time and say to Barbadians that they must prepare for their retirement. Sir, everybody in this society will not be able to provide adequate funds or shelter for themselves and, therefore, Government ought to help them but I believe that it is incumbent for us to send a message to all Barbadians, especially those who are working, that they must try to provide some of their income for their retirement and, therefore, National Insurance pensions should be made compulsory for all those persons who are working.

I believe that we should send the message that when you are working you should pay national insurance so that when you reach the age of retirement that, at least, you would be provided with some means of support and we must not be divided on this matter.

Sir, it is unfair for persons for who are driving taxis, and adequately employed at this time not to be paying national insurance. However, when they reach the age of retirement, age 60 to 70, a situation would exist where, if they do not pay their national insurance now we, who are paying our national insurance, would have to provide for them.

Mr. Speaker, I believe there should be a cut-off period for those persons who are not paying national insurance. We need to help those persons who rely on a non-contributory but I understand that there are still a few persons who are not receiving a non-contributory pension because the National Insurance has recognised that overtime these people must have been engaged in some meaningful employment and, therefore, they are not receiving this pension and this has to justified. However, as a Government we must try to help those persons who are now retired and who cannot provide for themselves.

11.40 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is true that we must provide a lot of medicine. I have seen an Inter-American Development Bank report which said that the poverty line in Barbados is about \$5 000, but it does not take into consideration the number of things that are provided for the elderly not by this Government alone but by past governments. For example, we provide free drugs to persons over 65 years and under 18 years. We provide free transportation for the aged. We repair the homes of many persons. We pay the electricity bills for persons who cannot pay for themselves. These are the things the Government is now providing for the elderly which we will continue to provide. Sir, I do not think that any government, either on That Side or This Side, will ever at any stage try to reduce the benefits that are now given to the elderly.

Asides.

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: I remember that. They were the only Government that stopped the income for the elderly. However, I do not believe that the present Leader of the Opposition would go down that road. I do not believe that the Leader of the Opposition would ever again subscribe to cutting the pensions or even putting a halt to pensions or to the cutting of wages because he believes in increases. He believes in pension increases and wage increases for the workers. So I do not believe that in the future we would see any tinkering at all with the level of benefits that we now give to the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, we are all getting old and within the next 20 or so years most of us in here would be on pensions. Therefore, I believe that action should be taken to provide opportunities for persons to invest in the society so that when they reach retirement age they can withdraw that money to adequately provide for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has taken the initiative to put plans in place where persons can buy into insurance schemes to help supplement their pension. This is what we should be encouraging our young people to do. We must not send a signal to the people that they can expect to receive a handout when they become 65. We must encourage people to be independent so that they can help themselves at that age.

Mr. Speaker, it is true that the community must help those persons who cannot help themselves. I believe that the community can help those persons who need to have adequate housing. There are times when some of the people in the society, especially the elderly, would need help in debushing around their homes and in paying their water bills and so on. However, it is not true to say that all persons who are 65 years old are poor. There are people in my constituency who totally rely on themselves. They pay their bills.

Mr. Speaker, I must say to the Leader of the Opposition that my great grandmother used to pay her tax bill religiously every November out of the pears she grew in the land. So I am saying to him that the majority of the elderly pay their bills. They have money put aside to pay their bills. Therefore, we must never believe that all of those people are as poor as the Opposition would want us to believe.

Mr. Speaker, when we agreed to sell the National Housing Corporation units, it was the elderly who said that they had the money to pay. There was a lady in The Pine who told us that she had the money put aside for over 25 years to buy the National Housing Corporation unit she was living in. She told me that the Democratic Labour Party promised to sell the houses but they did not sell them. She

was saying thank God that she now has the opportunity to buy and wanted to know when she can buy. Mr. Speaker, she was not saying that she wants any loan.

Mr. Speaker, the Democratic Labour Party cannot throw hot water and cold water at the same time. Years ago they claimed that they were the party of the family. They have a Family First Programme and all sorts of things.

Mr. Speaker, we put a policy in place that wherever there is an elderly person and younger persons living in the homes, they can join together as a family to buy the units where the young persons along with the elderly can go and get the mortgage and when the older person dies, the younger persons will continue to pay for the mortgage. That is a policy which we inherited from Costa Rica.

Sir, the Opposition does not believe in family policies. The Opposition speaks but does not understand what they are speaking. We are saying that the policy is for the future. We are looking at an elderly population and in the future there must be a policy where young persons can join with older persons to provide an opportunity for themselves so that the society would not go back and depend on Government. We must have a society like that. This is a policy that has been stated and we will continue it.

Mr. Speaker, when I went through this National Policy on Ageing, I recognised that there is opportunity for us to look at how the elderly can do more volunteer work in the society. Of course, this Green Paper speaks to the fact that they provide a lot of volunteer work. In fact, it is stated that more than 30 per cent of the persons above 60 years are involved in volunteer work, therefore, opportunities must be provided for them.

Mr. Speaker, in all developed societies opportunities are provided for persons when they reach the age of retirement. Sir, I have heard on This Side that retirement does not mean that you must go home and sit down and put your foot up. Retirement gives an opportunity for persons, perhaps through educational means where they can restructure their lives, like those who have gone to computer courses and are more computer alert now, to do things in the society not only to help in the church. That is why Government is making available more parks and community services in every community for the elderly and the young. It is stated in our Manifesto that we would provide opportunities for community services in every major community where persons could do handicraft or teach their trade. Mr. Speaker, my heart was blessed when a number of weeks ago we had a ceremony for those persons passing out at community centres across the island. Sir,

more than 25 per cent of those persons were in the age range of 50 and over, and the Minister of Social Transformation must be commended for this.
11.50 a.m.

Sir, at the Glebe Resource Centre, St. George, more than 25 per cent of those persons are above age 50, and this is commendable. We will continue to provide opportunities across Barbados where not only the elderly can do volunteer work but can help their communities with the knowledge that they possess.

Sir, I want to say to this Honourable Chamber that there is a lot of wealth, skill and opportunities in the elderly. The elderly are not looking for 'handouts' but for opportunities to do things in this society. They not only want to come out and run at the National Stadium but want to be actively involved in the economic life of the society. Many of them have retired and returned to Barbados and are prepared to put their money into these communities.

Mr. Speaker, when I was Minister of Housing, I went to a place called Lambeth House, London, where I talked to persons about the Senior Citizens Village concept which we now have at Vauxhall. Sir, it was this Government who pledged that we would set up more of those village-types across Barbados. We have earmarked land in St. George, St. Lucy and St. Peter for these villages.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. Either the Honourable Member was not in this House last week when I spoke, or he is deliberately misleading this House. I think the Honourable Member for Christ Church South alluded in his speech that the Senior Citizens Homes concept was first touted by a former Honourable Member for St. Michael West and provisions were made for that plan to be followed through in St. Lucy at the District Hospital, Hope Road.

If the Honourable Member wants to tell this House that the plans have been changed and that St. Lucy has been left out, then I would agree with him.

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, I do not know who was the author of that concept but when I first visited Lambeth House, we saw a situation where there were retired persons there.

Mr. Speaker, there are retired persons who do not want 'handouts' from Government but who would want a smaller house. These persons may have a three-bedroom or a four-bedroom house but might want to retire gracefully in a one-bedroom enclosed house, where there is security.

Asides.

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: I believe that when I become 70-plus that I should have an opportunity where I can leave my house and go to a community setting with other elderly persons to relax and to do things within a community arrangement. I believe that all persons should be aiming towards that rather than allowing themselves to go into a Government institution. Government institutions are for persons who cannot help themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that we had set aside land at Walkers, St. George, to be given to the Soroptimist West, Jamestown, for a senior citizens village.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House by giving the impression that he has already allocated land at Walkers, St. George, through the agency of the Government, to look after his retirement years. I would not like that to be part of the record because I do not believe that is what the Honourable Member is saying.

Asides.

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, some years ago land was allocated to the Soroptimist Club, Jamestown. They are supposed to set up a retirement village for the elderly. Sir, we are of the view that similar villages are to be set up across Barbados to help the elderly.

Sir, this is the way to go, where persons can use their Retirement Savings Plan and other means of wealth, to rent or to pay for these homes on a monthly basis, where communities can be formed.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this type of villa should not only be encouraged in the inner parishes but also on the coastal areas of St. Philip and St. Lucy, where these retirement villages could be set up so that the elderly could get some of the sea breeze in their retirement age.

Mr. Speaker, this is what we need to do. This Paper is an opportunity for us to look at what will happen in the future and not what is now happening and, therefore, has to be discussed.

Asides.

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: Sir, the Leader of the Opposition knows how the people have voted on housing in the last election. Therefore, the Honourable Member needs to come up with a new proposal of what will happen in the future. I know that the Leader of the Opposition has a lot of proposals and so we need to hear some of those views on those proposals.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the opportunity should be taken at this time for us to rehabilitate Bridgetown. I think the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East had made mention of this, which I would like to elaborate upon. The time has come for us, not only to provide proper roads but to provide better sidewalks.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please. Are you still on the Resolution?

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: Yes, Sir. As I go through Bridgetown, I am sometimes appalled by the state of the sidewalks that are built for the elderly and the disabled. I believe that we have to rehabilitate them.

As we go through Barbados, especially in Bridgetown, we see a situation where the elderly and those persons with walking sticks find it difficult to walk on the sidewalks and where wheelchair users find it difficult to use sidewalks.

Sir, Government will, in the near future, take the opportunity to rehabilitate the sidewalks within the city centres and within residential areas. We will also provide bus shelters with sidewalks, so that the elderly in particular can get off the bus, without having the difficulties which they now experience.

Mr. Speaker, on several occasions, elderly persons have called me, stating that it is the small things such as bus shelters and bus stops that they need. This is what society should be aiming towards, to help those persons in the society who have made a vital contribution and giving them the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is a good Green Paper on Ageing, and it should encourage a lot of debate from this Chamber and the wider society so that this paper would withstand the test of time and would be for the future.
12.00 noon

Hon. Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, I want to laud the efforts of the Minister of Social Transformation and his staff for the paper that has been presented to us and encourage all Barbadians to participate in the discussion so that their inputs can be recognised.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start by referring to the Bible because an Honourable Member on the Other Side said that my only training was in religious education but I am grateful for that opportunity because it has helped me to develop a strong moral base which I am able to live by and transfer to the rest of the society.

Mr. Speaker, I start by quoting the book of Proverbs, Chapter 22, verse 6:

“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

I also want to quote from Ephesians, Chapter 6, verses 1, 2 and 3 says:

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;

That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

Mr. Speaker, we know that people in the Bible lived for many years. Hannah, the mother of Samuel was an old woman when she conceived him and **Methushala** was also an old woman but they were highly respected in the community where they lived. I lament the disrespect that the youth in our society have for the themselves and in particular for the elderly but, Sir, do the adults not disrespect the aged and youth as well?

I can refer to myriad examples and I challenge Honourable Members on the Other Side to tell me that in August 2000 when voting was going on at the Democratic Labour Party headquarters for a leader that a former Honourable Member for St. Michael West was told to go home because it was time to resign. Mr. Speaker, he was an elder who played a significant role in the growth and development of the Democratic Labour Party and I challenge them to put their monies where their mouths are when they talk about respect for the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, the former Honourable Member for St. Joseph also lamented this fact because she spoke about the attitude of the Democratic Labour Party towards young and old women and I challenge them to speak after me on those issues which show that through the years they have forgotten the legacy of the Right Excellent Errol Barrow who, in his old age, became the leader of the Democratic Labour Party in 1986 and the Right Excellent Frank Walcott who in his old age continued to show the youth and others in Barbados that he would not be discarded because he was old, that he had a contribution to make and that he should be always respected.

Mr. Speaker, I have a difficulty with all seven Honourable Members on the Other Side but all is not lost because, the attitudes of Honourable Members on the side of the Barbados Labour Party and their contributions will show them that they should pay attention to the elderly in the society, starting with the elderly among themselves first and then transfer it to the remainder of the society.

Mr. Speaker, we have lost a lot of morals in this society particularly for the elderly. There is no respect in

buses for the elderly or for pregnant women who board buses every day. No one offers a seat to them. Sir, motorists do not recognise the elderly when they want to cross the street because they are constantly in a hurry. Mr. Speaker, our fore parents have taught us that we should help the elderly across the street but this impatient society will self-destruct because the Bible says that if we lose sight of our elderly, then we lose sight of all the moral values which have helped to build the society.

Mr. Speaker, we are flourishing because of the contribution that our fore parents made. Our national anthem says that these fields and hills beyond recall are now our very own because of the contribution of our fore fathers. Sir, we need to continue to pay respect to the elderly among us.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask where were the voices of the Honourable Members on the Other Side when the present Leader of the Opposition sat in an office for years during the austerity measures and did not raise his voice to the people of Barbados to say that it was wrong when the Democratic Labour Party instituted situations where Barbadians had to grapple with poverty when all kinds of draconian measures were instituted.

Sir, the Honourable Member for St. Philip West worked in the Geriatric Hospital and when no bandages or medications were available, we did not hear his voice. He now stands in here with his chest in the air and does not make mention of these things.

Mr. Speaker, I consider his mouthings to be hypocritical in this respect. Mr. Speaker, I hope the lips of the Honourable Members on the Other Side would become unsealed and that they would not be like Zacharias whose lips were sealed because he did comply with the promises of God when Elizabeth gave birth to her baby.

Mr. Speaker, last week, the Honourable Member for St. Michael East touched on areas of which I am proud. I do not always agree with his issue but in life we must respect each other's views. He spoke about the elders in the African culture and it brought me back to those days when aged people were role models and the backbone of the society. Sir, they were mentors and led by example but somehow we have been pushing the elderly in a corner and ignoring the contribution which they have made to this society. Sir, many of us have gone to school and have suddenly become 'bright' but have no skills to deal with life because education is not commonsense. Therefore, we need to observe the contribution of the elderly and promote them for their work.

Mr. Speaker, the national policy on ageing should be dealt with in a non-partisan way because it will impact not only on the growth and development of our communities but the society as a whole.

12.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you will notice that I have not mentioned anybody in the Barbados Labour Party because there are many persons who have been mentors for all of us in this Honourable House. I mentioned two honourable persons on the Other Side because I believe that they have made their mark and are trailblazers, not only in Barbados but in the world. Therefore, I mentioned them because I think that they deserve that recognition and I gave it to them when they were alive.

Mr. Speaker, it is no wonder in Barbados that every young person in Barbados sees politicians as persons who have no conscience and people who use people when they want a vote. Sir, constituents believe that they should see their representatives every day but when it comes to having a knowledge of the need of the elderly you cannot take it from this administration. We do our groundwork and we have channels of information. We visit people and we see the squalor that some of them live in and, indeed, we see the high standard of living that some of them enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the scorn and disrespect from the public towards politicians come from the fact that we sometimes tell people what they want to hear and do not tell them what they need to know.

Therefore, I hope that this debate continues in this vein where we tell Barbadians what they need to know so that they can help with the planning, discussion and coordination and so on regarding the ageing of individuals in our society.

Sir, we have lost many of our mentors and the type of apprenticeship approach that was used in the past. I think that as a result of losing the apprenticeship support that we had in our society, we are now seeing only a few welders who can do a good job. There are fewer joiners who can build chairs that are durable. The workmen of the past had excellent skills and these skills have not trickled down into our population in a way that I expected it to. We had blacksmiths who were able to work with any material and they made sure that anything that they made functioned.

Mr. Speaker, there were tinsmiths in Barbados that were so creative that they were able to take a milo tin or a tin that contained baby food, shaped it, put a handle on it and make it into a utensil that could be used in the home. We have lost all of those skills in our society and we now have to purchase these items from the stores. I do not call this culture a 'mash up and buy back' culture. I call it a mash up culture because a lot of what is being destroyed cannot be bought back.

Sir, we cannot continue to destroy the elderly among us by making them feel that when they reach the age of retirement, they must lie in a reclining chair, sit in a corner or go into a government institution because they serve no

useful purpose. I believe that seniors must have their dignity, support, opportunity, love, affection and care that are necessary for them to live longer. I believe that longevity is important.

Sir, I want to refer to when I was growing up. I have to do this because it is a true perspective of how the elderly should be treated. My mother used to say "once a man, twice a child" and we see it every day. We had teachers, neighbours, friends, priests and the whole spectrum of people in the communities who, after they reach the age of retirement, we see changes in their movement and how they speak and we sometimes think that they are dotish. These people were once children then they grew up, gained an education, shared their skills, worked and then they have entered into another phase of their lives where they are declining. Therefore, we must pay attention to the statement, "once a man, twice a child" because when these people reach the elderly stage of their lives they sometimes do simplistic things that we would not have expected them to say or do.

Mr. Speaker, those seniors had a philosophy that many young people do not have. Sir, you will notice that I did not say like myself because I consider myself to be in that category and I am a very proud member of the Barbados Association of Retired Persons. However, their philosophy was to work hard and save for their old age.

Mr. Speaker, the people in the past did not rely on the government to pay their land tax bill. I am sorry that the Honourable Member of St. George North did not make mention that the older people kept their land tax, water, and all their other bills attached to a hanger in their bedroom as a form of record keeping so as to remind that their bills were kept current. Sir, Barbadians need to do this kind of record keeping again to remove some of the mendicancy which we see creeping into the society. The older folks had a philosophy where they worked hard and provided for their old age so that the government did not have to bury them, that was the culture of Barbadians.

Mr. Speaker, when my grandmother became ill, in her old age, I learned numerous skills from my mother, who was an ordinary labourer. She learnt the various skills from her mother and she understood that people in the society looked after their ill relatives or elderly at home. Therefore, when my grandmother became ill and had a stroke my mother mixed candle grease and various oils and anointed her joints with it. Sir, she took a nutmeg and put it into her mouth so that there could be some rotation of the tongue to assist her in regaining her speech. My mother put a hopping ball in her hand and did all kinds of things with it as a form of therapy. Sir, there was no physiotherapist available. In addition, when she could not help herself my mother turned her periodically so that she did not get bed sores. Sir, my mother never had any training in the care of the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, I was always there with my mother and often she would leave me to supervise my grandmother when she was ailing. I believe that more people are doing this kind of service in communities across Barbados but we need to have it properly encapsulated so training and advice can take place and women, in particular, who are willing to offer those services can be offered the training, as is offered by the Samuel Jackman Polytechnic and some other private agencies, so that more people in the community can get the opportunity to work with the aged and to bring some measure of comfort to them.

Sir, my mother prepared meals such as broth, pigeon soup and things of that nature to help improve my grandmother's health. I believe that the inter-generational and family links, as outlined in this document, should be fostered. I am sure that the community consultation will bring that to pass.

Mr. Speaker, I think a lot of emphasis should be placed on the intergeneration and family link and traditions such as skills, culture and values within our system and be able to translate them into our daily lives.

Sir, longevity is due to good diet, health, exercise, quality care and so on. Longevity arose from the meals that our fore parents ate. They were no supermarkets for them to go. They planted their own vegetables and fruit in the small spaces that were around their homes or the spots that they rented from the plantations. They knew the quantity of pesticide to be given to the plants, if they used pesticide. Therefore, if we can get back to a culture of utilising the small and large spaces by growing our own food, the diets of our seniors would be more nutritious and they would be able to live a healthier life.

Sir, I think that introduction of the Home Help Programme and the National Assistance Board in 1980/1981 was a progressive step of the then administration of the Barbados Labour Party, where housing was being looked at. A lot of people still occupy those houses that were constructed at that time and a lot of them are being repaired by the government at this time.
12.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the health care that has been offered to our people in Barbados speaks volumes to what is happening in other Caribbean countries and in some other countries of the world that we consider to be developed countries. In this respect, I want to laud the efforts of successive governments for making the effort to change and for introducing legislation that has brought about many of the social changes in our society.

Mr. Speaker, the home help programme has over 200 persons working with it and more than 750 recipients.

I am happy to say that some of my constituents get that benefit because I too, like the other Honourable Members in this Chamber, have seniors who live alone and who have no one to look after their needs even though they may have children.

Mr. Speaker, the challenge that we also have is senior citizens who live alone who are exploited every day. If no home help is given to these persons some of them would be found dead because if they go into a coma or have an asthmatic attack there would be no one there to give assistance. We have men who dress in collar and tie and carry an attaché case who go into communities targeting our senior citizens and telling them they will repair the house or have water attached to their houses and so on and then they move away with a lot of the funds that the seniors have, particularly their pensions. That is wrong, Mr. Speaker, but that is as a result of some of them living alone. Mr. Speaker, it hurts me to know of those elderly people who are physically and sexually abused in this country either by their own children or by other individuals who do not have any scruples. Mr. Speaker, it is all wrong when a man seeks to rape an old woman of 60, 75 or 85 years or any woman at all for that matter. Therefore, we need to have a closer examination of the aged who are being abused sexually, verbally or physically.

Mr. Speaker, some of these elderly people have electricity in the home but they have this mentality that they are accustomed to the lamp from a little girl or a little boy and so they would not use the electricity for lighting but would use the lamps and sometimes they might have curtains hanging over the lamp and they will catch afire and caused the house to be burnt. That too is a challenge if there is no one else there with them.

Mr. Speaker, the challenge that really hurts in the belly has to do with the abandonment of our seniors. When I was growing up my mother would talk about the almshouse and we saw it as somewhere that when you are ill you would be put there to get medical treatment and when you are better you will come back home. Mr. Speaker, I believe that the change in the name from the almshouse to the district hospital is very important. The district hospitals are overpopulated with seniors who have children who have the resources that can pay for them.

Mr. Speaker, I am associated with a district hospital working with the friends of the association and it pains my heart to see family members of these old people turning up with lawyers and with documents for these old people to sign away their life, after they have been in these Government institutions for five, six or ten years during which time they never brought a cake of soap, an underpants, a hair comb or a bottle of mouthwash for them. The other sad side of that is that some of them still get pensions and it is only when the life certificates come that one knows that they have a family.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am calling on all Barbadians to get a conscience and make sure that they look after the aged. Whether they have to be institutionalised or not the aged deserve our care and attention because that is the only way we would be recognised and live long on God's land. We have to take care of our own.

Mr. Speaker, I have been able to look at the National Assistance Board's Annual Report for 2000-2001 which I believe is a document of this House. That report outlines a number of recreational facilities that are available and the activities that go with them for our senior citizens most of whom may be living alone or who have relatives who are working and cannot look after them. They can be taken to these facilities for safe keeping, for educational programmes, for inspirational development through the Bible, through singing and through socialisation. Mr. Speaker, I have learnt that they are 13 such facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy this morning to say that the elderly folks in the constituency of St. Thomas eagerly await a care of the elderly facility. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, a location has been earmarked for such a facility. This Barbados Labour Party Government has pledged to the people of St. Thomas a care of the elderly facility where they can be taken in the morning and return for them in the afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, you are well aware that in the 1950s and the 1960s successive governments of Barbados spent a lot of time, and it was deserving, building the regular day nurseries for babies. We do need more nursery schools. We also need more day nurseries in other locations because people are moving from location to location and there are some communities where there are no daycare facilities. Mr. Speaker, this Government is working with the private sector in a number of areas to ensure that facilities are made available.

Mr. Speaker, as a Government we must now place emphasis on the construction of facilities for the care of the elderly. I know that the district hospitals are doing excellent work because in the year 2001-2002 two centenarians were living at the Gordon Cummins District Hospital who have been living in that institution for many years. Therefore, I have to thank the nurses, the general workers and those relatives and friends who made sure that those seniors were comfortable in that environment.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other things I wanted to say, but I just want to say that I give 100 per cent support to those women in the communities and indeed the men, if the men so desire, because there are a few men who want to be care givers, who are pooling together in teams to come up with projects where they can help with the establishment of facilities for care of the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, I support every measure where schools are encouraging, inviting and indeed accommodating senior citizens who want to come back into the school system and volunteer their services. They are tithing their time. I can speak of the Early Childhood Association where former head teachers and teachers have come together and are tithing their time to help to promote good skills and practices within the nursery schools. Mr. Speaker, I would not call their names because of lack of time and I have not informed you.

Mr. Speaker, people go into the schools and play music because there is no music teacher. Others take a lawn mower and clean around the school and the little children get a chance to chat with them. Others are helping with the gardening and the 4H Movement. Others are helping with the scouting movement. Others are doing story telling and are passing on other cultural values through games and the preparation of local dishes within our schools. Indeed, the CHEKS Programme with the Landship, the tuk bands and stilt walking helps to carry on that cultural expression that we have enjoyed for many generations.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to encourage all Barbadians to come out and give their expressions and to get involved in this whole discussion that will take place because no society is deserving of a name unless we have the young, the middle age and the aged. The aged must always be a prime resource when we are looking at how we deal with them, how we treat to them, how we show them respect and how they pass on the norms and the values from one generation to another. If we do this, Mr. Speaker, we would all be emulating a real true African development where the elders, the role models, the mentors and those who set the example live by it and those moral values can trickle down through the system.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and give my wholehearted support to this Green Paper "Toward a Society for All Ages – A National Policy on Ageing".

I am obliged to you, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this Sitting be suspended until 1.30 p.m. today.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: I beg to second that.

The question that the Sitting do now suspend until 1.30 p.m. today was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER suspended the Sitting accordingly.
12.30 p.m.

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER: This Sitting is resumed. The Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central.

Mr. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, there are few topics more engaging and as complex or all-embracing as the topic which is before this Honourable House, as addressed in the Green Paper, as brought by the Minister of Social Transformation: Towards a Society for All Ages – A National Policy for Ageing.

Mr. Speaker, I make that initial comment because one must recognise the financing of systems for the elderly of all generations because we move from infancy once we are able to traverse the difficulties of that life, right through to a period when we should enjoy three score years and ten. Sir, all national economies have had to grapple with systems to take care of people of an ageing population and so we in Barbados have to grapple with issues relevant to persons within that particular age range.

Mr. Speaker, let me say from the outset that I do not intend to make this a partisan political debate even though Honourable Members on the Other Side have, by their mere expressions and their ability to grandstand on such issues, would seek to draw me out for me to clash with them on an issue such as this. But in keeping with the training of my grandmother who passed when she was 96 and her bones and flesh interred in the graveyard of St. Bartholomew Church but her soul and spirit residing in the warm comfort and embrace of our Saviour and God, she, along with many others in our community and in our village, have made it possible for everyone of us who now find our purpose and our being in this Honourable House, to say it is from their training, contribution, their denial of themselves, that we have somewhat "arrived".

Therefore, when I speak of the elderly, I do not speak in the terms of the hypocrites or in terms of disdain but I speak with a genuine appreciation of a lady from the village of Fairy Valley who we referred to as "Assi Dukes". She was a lady who weighed many pounds but who made some of the sweetest sweetbread that the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central would have ever tasted. These were individuals who sat you down and taught you the wisdom of the ancient or the wisdom of life. Therefore, when one connects even now with those messages and stories, I am therefore, disheartened that some who rise to speak, would do so with a form of polarity that truly belies the contributions of those elders.

I will not be drafted to that mind-set which says that we must stand in Parliament every Tuesday and not be genuine in our understanding and appreciation of the issues which are here before us. Sir, this is an issue beyond issues.
1.40 p.m.

We must focus on delivery to our elders. The issue of ageing also speaks to the question of how our democracy must treat its people and how it approaches issues of this ilk. It is an area in which we struggle because sometimes to find understanding to a given reality, we must engage in mental struggle with ourselves and others to bring forward that which is sensible and useful.

Mr. Speaker, old age means different things to different people in different cultures. Last week, the Honourable Member for St. Michael East spoke quite eloquently, even though sometimes he was persuaded by the prompting of those who do not understand, to sway him into the erratic as he sought to deny the beautiful contribution of the Honourable Member for St. Philip West. Sir, he understands the historic movement of people from Africa, India or Europe who now have their base here in Barbados and spoke to the traditions of respect from which we all had our genesis regardless of our origin.

Mr. Speaker, we must continue to respect and have an understanding of these things so that when we engage in topics such as these the focus must be on the issue before us. I want to compliment the Minister of Social Transformation who, on the other side, seems to be the proverbial boy on the burning deck.

Sir, I remember two months ago when the Senior Citizens Village was opened at Vauxhall. I looked around for Members of his Party and for Honourable Members on the Other Side but I only saw the Honourable Member for Christ Church West Central. Sir, when I enquired of the Minister where his colleagues were, his response was muted because he felt hurt and pain relative to an issue that touches his heart with the deepest passion. Sir, not one of them braved the sun on that given day to celebrate the opening of the Senior Citizens Village in Vauxhall to give him the support and comfort as he journeyed into a difficult arena.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the public when he suggests that the absence of members at the opening function is an absence of support. In fact, the facilities were approved by Cabinet and could not be realised without the support of Cabinet which is the greatest support of all. I should be grateful if the Honourable Member could get to the substance of his speech so that we do not have to endure any more introduction.

Mr. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, it is all well and good to speak of planting fruits but it is at the time of reaping that you need greater hands to do the task or the fruit will rot in the fields. Sir, it is okay to talk but some colleagues are neglected while others are uplifted. I strike a cord for the Minister of Social Transformation from This Side because I

have always found him to be a gentleman who fights on behalf of the underprivileged and downtrodden.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please do not forget the rule of imputation.

Mr. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, I do not impute improper motives towards anyone. I was making the point that when the first senior citizens village is being opened on the part of the Government and is being touted the harbinger of more to come that the Minister should have had greater levels of support. Mr. Speaker, the point has been made, the rope has been swung and many of them have been hung.

Mr. Speaker, the face, soul and spirit of a nation can be determined by how the society treats its young, the poor, disadvantaged and more particularly the elderly. This Green Paper seeks to outline a series of initiatives which assert how it will guide governmental and national policy on the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, the elderly of our country are treasures. They can be referred to as such because they are the historical planters of seeds of development of Barbados and, by and large, were the tillers of our plantations and domestics in the homes of the more affluent. Many of them suffered instances of degradation in their early years which would have driven the mentally deficient, the weak-hearted and poor in spirit to commit desperate acts in order to survive. Mr. Speaker, I support all our elderly citizens for their contribution to Barbados and the elevation of this country regardless of the hurt and shame which many of them were forced to endure. This comes from a fundamental understanding of the emergence such as a country like Barbados which has reached its present stage today. We cannot deny the contribution made by the elderly against all odds.

Mr. Speaker, their work and contribution formed the foundation of this country and no effort must be spared to ameliorate their conditions whenever they are threatened by further hardship in meeting their basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, medicinal care and their safety and security. I also want to suggest that safety and security must be a paramount part in the Green Paper.

1.50 p.m.

It must be paramount of any policy to deal with the elderly because there are persons in our society who see our elderly as vulnerable and, therefore, prey on them like parasites. They prey on them and deprive them sometimes of life and liberty or life, limb and liberty.

Sir, this is not only done by strangers but it is done by some family members who see the pensions of the elderly as an opportunity for them to satisfy their own needs. This

is a terrible tragedy of humanity and it is something that I would want to appeal to all of those persons who work with the elderly and speak to the elderly to get the message across the length and breadth of Barbados that we cannot victimise our senior citizens as some persons tend to do. We must move away from that ungodly or unchristian-like behaviour to prey upon the elderly.

Sir, sometime ago several instances were drawn to my attention and I waited with bated breath to hear the Minister of Labour address this issue. We heard of the difficulties the National Insurance had with the computers, hardware and software. I called it the pensions debacle. Sir, the oversilence of the Minister to address the issue of many persons who waited for their pensions, new ones in particular, for a year to satisfy their needs. Sir, even though sometimes we are critical of persons within our society, it took some citizens in our country to rise and assist them augmenting their nutritional needs. Many of them depleted their meagre incomes and the Minister of Labour kept silent.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Social Transformation, as a resident of the constituency of Christ Church East Central, agonised about it but did not confront it. Let us not stand up in this Honourable House and pompasett that the Government has been the elixir for the majority of the elderly in Barbados, because it is an instance such as the one I just identified that truly demonstrates the commitment to ameliorating difficulties which our senior citizens suffer from time to time and this is contrary to the evidence which is before us.

Sir, I do not want to place any blame on them because Honourable Members on the Other Side are quick to shed blame like the snake that slides across the field and sheds its skin from time to time because they are able to do this quickly.

Sir, it has already been made quite clear by the Honourable Member for St. Philip West as to the myriad of health issues which affect our elderly. He brought facts, statistics, not based on some vicarious posturing but from an actual interfacing with senior citizens who are in the geriatric hospitals in this country. Many persons told him that he was wrong but different people saw things differently. Sir, what is important, and what we must address, is that there are seniors in our country who are being neglected for the lack of adequate health care, that is the issue. It is not about whether the money rose from \$178 million, which is allocated by central government, to \$280 million in the year 2004/2005. It is not about that.

Sir, as we allocate more money into these institutions we seem to be getting less service and results. Mr. Speaker, maybe, when we look at the elderly in a holistic way we might need to reconsider if it makes sense throwing money after money without looking at the money that is allocated

and getting people to do their work and getting governmental institutions to deliver the care that they should be delivering. We can raise money and if the conditions remain the same, then that money would have been unwisely used.

Sir, it is not about the Honourable Member for Christ Church South, who seemed to have been stung by the presentation of the Honourable Member for St. Philip West, and, therefore, regurgitated a series of statistics but have not truly told us what systems would be put in place, what new services will be implemented or what new programmes will be organised to emphatically impact upon the elderly in Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, I do not want to trample on anyone's corns. My good friend, the Honourable Member for Christ Church South does not have to worry. I am not attacking him at all. He has a difficult Ministry to deal with and issues for the elderly can be difficult and he has to confront those issues. Since the Honourable Member seems incapable of utilising all the talents around him, then I can see him being burdened by the Ministry of Health and caring for the elderly which is a major part of the health care environment in Barbados.

Sir, in fact, if the Honourable Member wants me to hold his shoulder I will do that. I promise that I will not rub his shoulder. I will just hold his shoulder.

Asides.

Mr. R. D. JONES: Sir, older persons in our society need to assert their independence, dignity, self-worth, self-esteem and self-actualisation. There are persons who believe that when you reach the age of 60, as the Honourable Member for St. Thomas is gradually reaching, you can be placed on the proverbial heap and be allowed to wither away.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order, please, order.

Mr. R. D. JONES: We are missing an opportunity to utilise talents as exemplified by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas and which have been fostered over the years because the Honourable Member has passed through the fire. Therefore, it was a compliment in her honour on behalf of the elderly in this country.

Sir, it is always assumed that wisdom and talent come through the passage of time and it is in the expression of that wisdom and talent that is important. I heard the Honourable Member for St. Thomas speak today and I marvelled at her approaching maturity relative to her

contribution in this Honourable House. So, we have to assert that need for further self-esteem and self-actualisation.
2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have come across many instances of elderly persons, who because of the quality of their lives coming through early childhood, adolescence and maturity, were proud and dignified people, but as ill-health attacked them sometimes they lose some of their physical and mental faculties and you could see the struggle and the embarrassment as they try to assert their self-esteem in those circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, let us do more on behalf of those persons. Let us not only talk about the allocation of free passage on buses or about the provision of water-borne toilets which are interesting innovations. These are all practical demonstrations of what governments over time have been doing for some of the elderly population in Barbados, but we need to move beyond those things. We will not have as a government or as a Parliament to be seeking to provide those things if we do some things earlier.

Sir, this Green Paper must not be about the existing elderly alone but about persons who have traversed year to year over time because they too will move in to the realms of being called the elderly. So let us put systems and financial packages in place to ensure that the elderly are taken care of in this way.

Mr. Speaker, we spoke earlier on housing for the elderly. The Honourable Member for St. George North spoke about this elderly lady he met about a year ago who had her money saved up over 25 years ago waiting to purchase a National Housing unit. I like these anecdotes that come from the minds and hearts of Honourable Members. Mr. Speaker, I do not know from whence that elderly lady came, but if she was an elderly lady in the constituency of Christ Church East Central she would already have had the comfort of her own home bought by proper and caring advice of the representative and not keeping her money for 25 years waiting to buy the National Housing Corporation unit. Therefore, we need to stop bringing these trifling non senses into this House as a demonstration of our commitment.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the Government should be taxing the pensions of the elderly in Barbados. They can tax them if they are making income through real estate development or the rental of their houses. They have already paid taxes through their teeth. Government should take its hands off their pensions. I do not care if they get \$10 000 or \$100 000. They have already paid their taxes, that is their pension and Government should leave it alone. This Government is now looking for all kinds of things and ways to deprive the elderly of their pensions. They need to stop it. Government can tax the income but not the pensions of the elderly. Mr. Speaker, as a government and as a

Parliament let us not appear to be leeches on the part of the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, I want to thank the Minister of Social Transformation – again I seem to be giving him a little tap on his shoulders – for the establishment of the Senior Citizens' Village at Vauxhall in the constituency of Christ Church East Central. I know that idea was fostered by him in the early 1990s as a consultant to the National Assistance Board. When he moved to the Other Side – and I know with great pain – he continued to address this issue and brought the product to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, there are many detractors of him – I know, I hear them – but I want him to ride on because one day soon his reward would not necessarily come on earth but would come in heaven, so I am saying to him, ride on my brother.

Mr. Speaker, let me make a few quick points. I want to see the safety net for the elderly enhanced and further developed. I also want to see the financial capacity of the elderly improved, but it must start from early systems in our early lives. We must look at these things.

Sir, some Honourable Members spoke about the notion of the extended family, but I want to go beyond that, I want to speak to the notion of the extended community. I do not know if necessarily I want to see the elderly segregated in particular villages. I am accustomed to interfacing and interacting with the elderly in my village, and the learning, knowledge, understanding and the appreciation was felt there. So let us not segregate them in villages for the elderly unless there is an easy flow and an easy interaction of those elderly villages with the wider community through visits and journeys from the village into the community where they can sit on the shop step and interface with the people from the villages. That is the kind of thing I want to see, not these secluded gate-shutting villages which hide our elderly from interfacing with the wider public.

Mr. Speaker, I want to see a promotion of community care at the homes of the elderly. Let us not force them to catch a bus or to pay a taxi because the ambulance would not come to help them get to the primary care or the secondary care institutions to get their health taken care of. Let us understand what we are talking about and how these things can impact on the quality of life of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I remember as a youngster in a youth group in the 50s, 60s and 70s going to the Oistins District Hospital and bringing cheer and comfort and contributing and reading a story or two to the elderly there. A lot of these systems have been removed by people, not necessarily

because people do not want to do it, but because government sees itself as the be all and the end all, and then citizens step back. We must not have citizens stepping back, Mr. Speaker. We must have citizens going forward with the government, I am talking about the government in its wider sense, working hand-in-hand to bring the delivery of services, goods and whatever else the elderly of our country need.

Mr. Speaker, as we move from Green Paper to White Paper and as we struggle over issues, we must not let this issue be a dividing point or line between us. Government can draw substance and understanding from those of us on This Side who understand some of these issues and from the wider Barbadian community because at the end of the day it is the seniors of Barbados whom we want to lift up so that they would have a better quality of life.

I thank you.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, it is with a sense of pleasure and indeed a sense of limitless patriotism that I venture forth to comment on this consultation document which we have before us today.

You would however forgive me, Mr. Speaker, for my assuming and taking unto myself the responsibility of responding to some of the comments which were made over on the Other Side. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member who has just spoken, has suggested that at the height of the crisis at the National Insurance Scheme that I was silent. The Honourable Member was not correct.
2.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I was not silent. I ensured that the officers responsible for the daily administration of the Scheme kept me abreast of what was happening. I, more or less, badgered them on a daily basis, to try to get something done about the problem. Indeed, some of those officers went public and made contributions on call-in programmes to suggest what was being done.

Mr. Speaker, out of a sense of humanity, when approached by the scores of Barbadians, I actually intervened on their behalf, to ensure that the difficulties they were experiencing had been solved. Therefore, it would not be true that I was silent. Indeed, I kept a Press conference. However, I will forgive the Honourable Member who, in the words of a colleague, delivered a speech which was lacking in substance and in quality.

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West, who is usually a man given to clear elocution and some learning, has, towards the

end of his contribution, suggested that incomes or wages may be decreased.

Mr. Speaker, I take it that perhaps the Honourable Member may have been mentioning that there could be some agitation for further wage restraints. That is the most generous interpretation I can put on it but I am not aware of any concerted attempt by anybody in this country to lower wages and salaries.

Mr. C. A. MASCOLL: On a point of order. The Honourable Member for St. James North is obviously misleading this Honourable House. I said incomes and wages may reduce with respect to real wage, which is the spending power and not with respect to nominal wage. He is normally a very accurate man, a man who is prone to accuracy.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, before coming to the comments made by the Honourable Member for St. Philip West, I want to comment on something which I saw in the newspaper recently, where one which I would call a wit rather than a miscreant, went somewhere recently and spoke to the issue of the possibility of a decline in national insurance pensions. I checked a newspaper, from which I cannot quote, and read in *The Barbados Advocate*, normally a very good paper – and in the absence of any reporter's error – that a Mr. Durant said that national insurance pensions were destined to be decreased by 30 per cent.

Sir, nothing can be further from the truth. Indeed, during the course of my contribution today, I will make some extensive reference to national insurance.

Mr. Speaker, in the context of this debate, I believe the tone was properly set by Honourable Members for St. Michael East, St. Thomas and St. George North and, generally speaking, most Honourable Members on This Side, that we have to see those persons who are now older than us, who have made a contribution, not just as old people but as elders.

The term elders holds not just a connotation of being persons ripe in age, it automatically carries with it a degree of respect. Therefore, as an African society, before Barbados became too modern, we used to be able to attribute and to impute considerable respect to those who were of greater years than we.

Sir, it is in the context of us being a God-fearing society that I would want to suggest that in this country, there are those persons who have worked and built this country up, and who should be protected as their years go on.

Mr. Speaker, in this regard, I want to highlight the contribution of a former Honourable Member of this House,

Mr. Lionel Seymour Craig, who, from the time he was elected as an Honourable Member for St. James and then St. James North, has spent years agitating for increased pensions for old aged persons. The Honourable Member was in this Parliament for about 20 years and, throughout his years, has spent a lot of time on the Floor of this Honourable House, asking for a better deal for old aged pensioners. Sir, Mr. Lionel Seymour Craig has to be given his correct place in our Parliamentary history.

Mr. Speaker, I will now agree with the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central. Equally, we have to identify those community organisations such as the Soroptimist, Kiwanis and Lions Clubs that have done a lot for our elderly citizens. We have, among us, a Member who has served the Kiwanis Club brilliantly, the Honourable Member for St. Andrew.

The current Honourable Member for St. Andrew, though not in his chair, has worked hard with the Kiwanis Club, which is a relatively young community-based group, and has seen a lot of work done in the interest of our elders. The Lions Club has also made its contribution.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central was correct for a change when he mentioned that the Soroptimist Club has made a substantial contribution to uplifting the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at the generic elderly of Barbados. Permit me to be both philosophical and, at the same time, a bit daring. Sir, the traditional Barbadian elder, age 65 and over, who exist among us, would have been a person seized of spirituality, honesty and hard work, as the Honourable Member for St. George North has said. A lot of these people did not get a chance to pursue conventional employment and, therefore, some of them had to become market vendors.

Sir, the typical market vendor, including the most imitable vendor has been one who would have risen early, practised thrift, who would have known how to purchase at what price and how to sell, to be able to attract a clientele. That vendor would have been a person who is environmentally-friendly and would have cleaned up after trading his or her ware. Our traditional market vendor became a market vendor out of the product of dire necessity and often because of the absence of opportunities in conventional employment.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen market vendors becoming elders, while maintaining their Godliness, humanity, dignity and thrift. Sir, the fact about the entrepreneurial spirit which we so often mention in this Honourable House, has never been unknown in the annals of Barbados' history. There must be Honourable Members in this Honourable House

who were both fed out of a tray or out of what we call stocks, meaning animals such as pigs, sheep, cows, *et cetera*.

Mr. Speaker, we have had market vendors in this country who have not only demonstrated efficiency as business persons but also progressiveness. I am sure there is a market vendor somewhere in this country who has become computer literate and operates computer technology and would be very willing to pass on his or her skills of entrepreneurship.

Mr. Speaker, in the context of where our elderly are today, I commend all Honourable Members, including the Honourable Member on my right, who has carefully isolated the contributions that our elderly have made to culture. That is a point this Parliament must trumpet over and over. The initiative by the Ministry of Social Transformation to mobilise the 'Golden Girls' to take part in music, craft and arts, has to be commended.

The Honourable Member for Christ Church East went further as he correctly put the position that Barbadian folklore has always been enriched often by the vernacular. For example, if one listens to that 75-year-old lady from Marley Vale, St. Philip, uttering Barbadian atavisms such as "God don't like ugly", "the berry don't fall far from the tree". "wha' in the old goat, does be in the kiddy".
2.20 p.m.

We have had relatively young people like Addy Forde and Frank Collymore who were careful to identify the contribution of the elderly. Sir, as we move forward in Barbados that section of our community life called culture must be permitted to be facilitated further and must not only be practised by all and sundry but where we have the elderly in the midst who can give us aspects of our oral history and tradition, as a Parliament, we have to be more supportive.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Philip West is by no means a wicked or evil man but if he is misguided, that is another question. The Honourable Member for St. Philip West made a lot about pensions and I think there is scope in this Parliament to carefully look at pensions. The Honourable Member for St. George North said that we owe it to ourselves to ensure that while we are able, we are so thrifty as to prepare for retirement.

The Barbados Labour Party has in the last eight years in particular facilitated a number of pension plans. There have been fiscal measures in the form of tax relief where if you buy particular private pension plans, you can claim them on your income tax returns.

Mr. Speaker, I have not concluded my debate with the Honourable Member for St. Philip West but before we become too emotional about people working for low

incomes and such like, we have to be realistic. Sir, it cannot be right that a person could live to age 25, 40, 45 or 50 but at age 65 he still has nothing.

Mr. Speaker, last Tuesday in the United Kingdom at 11 o'clock Greenwich Mean Time, there was a raging debate in Britain about millions of people who, unfortunately, are not preparing for old age and will be impecunious when they reach the age of 65 brought on often by spendthrift inclinations. I am not saying this is the scenario in Barbados but using that experience, the message for us is that we must necessarily prepare for old age.

Mr. Speaker, the news in Great Britain last year said that Government was beginning to worry about the millions of people who do not prepare for retirement because the Government fears that when people become age 65 and were spendthrift and wasteful that pressure would be put on the State to step in and the social security system is the mechanism in the State. Sir, we do not want it to come to a stage in this sovereign Barbados when persons are called upon to contribute 35 or 40 per cent to a social security scheme especially in circumstances, hypothetically, if there are already pre-existing high levels of taxation.

Mr. Speaker, if I assess the contributions which Barbadians make presently to the social security system, it is about 13.9 per cent of income but, Mr. Speaker, permit me to address the question of social security in Barbados. We heard the Honourable Member for St. Philip West say that it is unfortunate that people are made to rely on small sums of money in their old age but we have to be careful as to be prudent enough perhaps to develop an all-party attitude to this question of pensions and old age. Indeed, the Consultation Paper brought by the Honourable Member is seeking to address some of the burning issues. Sir, the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East, therefore, has to be congratulated because a lot of the burning issues facing seniors are in that paper.

Mr. Speaker, on the question of social security, Barbados has done what many a country has not done because Barbados has done pension reform. Let the Durants of this world know that Barbados stands out as a small developing country which has undertaken pension reform that will work.

I refer to the tenth *Actuarial Review* of the National Insurance Board which is already a document of this House. Sir, in the tenth *Actuarial Review*, it was projected that if Barbados did not modify and reform its social security programme that we would have a situation where in the absence of a concerted policy of modernisation that by the year 2039 we would be in a bad position. In the world of actuarial science, for social security purposes, if your social

security system is going to be viable, five workers must be paying the pension of one person. In 2039, in the absence of pension reform the figure could have been 2.11 workers. However, Mr. Speaker, the methods introduced, have put us in a position where, in the words of the eleventh *Actuarial Report* which is about to be published soon, we will maintain viability certainly to 2030.

In addition, the amazing thing about the *Osborne Report* is that it says two important things. It says that Barbados National Insurance Scheme, notwithstanding the few hiccups caused by computers, is the finest in the region. It also says that between 2004 and 2030, even if there is ever another economic holocaust, that the social system will survive. That is an important point.
2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to be partial. In all this we have to be grateful to the Almighty, not only for the scheme and for those who worked with the scheme, persons like Humphrey Walcott but we have to be grateful for people like Sir Clyde Gollop, who was a great patriot in favour of this policy. I am not permitted to offer tribute to Dame Elsie Payne today but people of that ilk are elders worth emulating and these people helped us to reach this stage.

Mr. Speaker, we also have to be grateful for our high life expectancy. I am going to utter some words which might be accompanied by tears. Mr. Speaker, Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados, CARICOM member States, early in their economic and social history achieved outstanding achievements in public health care, particularly for the elderly.

Sir, as a Barbadian interested in CARICOM unity, I am being asked by people on the streets what is the degree of engagement by CARICOM of the country in our area that is hard hit by a low life expectancy? The tears come as we reflect on Haiti. Mr. Speaker, we clearly have come to a point in the CARICOM region where Barbados, Jamaica and Guyana must use their rich experience of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s in public health care and education.

Sir, this morning on the news the Haitians were complaining that their biggest challenge is public health and sanitation and this would have been so for a long time. We, in CARICOM, this side of the Caribbean, must not only vote in favour of Haiti having elections. Sir, elections may be necessary but it is not sufficient by itself, which is a prerequisite to get Haiti going. Sir, when Haiti settles down, CARICOM has to take responsibility for revolutionising health care and education in Haiti and it must start in the streets. I mention this in the context of ageing because we in Barbados are ageing.

Mr. Speaker, your life expectancy, with God's continuing grace and mercy to you, will be higher than that

of the average Haitian. We if we are going to be regionalist, we owe it to Haiti to get up and share our experience with them at the level of the parish clinics and at the level of the health inspectors who visited homes, went into the yards and used ladles to ensure that mosquitoes, larvae and other vermin were not there. We owe it to the people of Haiti as we push integration in the region to teach them the basics because it is on health care and education that we have been catapulted into this special dimension of existence of which so many countries are envious and we must share what we have.

Sir, the word 'Haitianisation' has unfortunately become associated with poverty and that has to end. If we are to be meaningful members of CARICOM, when the dust in Haiti has settled, we just cannot say that we want Haiti to have elections, which might be necessary but it is not sufficient. We have to get them going to a point where they can have proper health care and education so that they could live rich and long lives. That is what you call laying the foundation, which the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West would do well to emulate so as to stop interventions coming which he would not necessarily want on each occasion.

Sir, permit me to conclude by looking at a few things about national insurance. One of the amazing things about our national insurance position is that the total number of non-contributory pensioners is fast declining. That to some considerable extent is linked to the fact that more people are of the working age.

Sir, in 1994, \$49.4 million were paid out in non-contributory pensions and in 2003, \$37.3 million. I am not saying that is a big thing but I am saying that some persons who would have gone for a non contributory pension, by being in the work force for 10 years have now become contributory because the contributory pensions have increased from \$76.4 million in 1994 to \$162.5 million in 2003.

Mr. Speaker, to stress the point about increasing life expectancy, funeral grants in Barbados have declined remarkably. Our people are living longer.

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, in 1994 funeral grants stood at \$0.9 million. Today, 10 years later, the total number of funeral grants has declined and funeral grants paid in 2003 were \$2 million, notwithstanding the fact that this enlightened Barbados Labour Party administration increased the funeral grant recently.

Mr. Speaker, we have a record of which we can be justly proud. In respect of persons earning maternity benefits, ironically, on average the national insurance

contribution is 13.9 per cent of income and the fertility rate in Barbados is approximately 13.9 per cent. The significance of that for planners is, that is also tied in with the ageing population because as the population gets older and fewer people are born and fewer people enter the workforce, it challenges planners to plan for persons of old age.

Mr. Speaker, I commend this document to this Honourable House. The Honourable Member for St. Michael South East is a social engineer and a man that I view with compassion, not now nor yesterday but since 1975 when I met him and the Honourable Member for St. Michael East, equally a humanitarian but who would not try to woo the best and even now I am not satisfied that we are not still being wooed. The Honourable Member wooed, not that they would give in to the charm of the tempter or temptress.

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Sir, as the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central said, some old people are not only given less than their share but are prone to abuse and this was confirmed by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas.

Sir, I am saying that the purpose of this consultation document is to attract comment to guide policy. It excellently conceptualises and bears potential to revolutionise the protocol for the aged because it was on the efforts of the aged that this modern nation State was built.

Mr. Speaker, with those brief modest observations I am most deeply obligated to you.

I thank you.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. Philip North.

Mr. M. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to enter this debate on the Green Paper on the National Policy on Ageing which has been presented by the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East.
2.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of things were mentioned about the programme this present Administration has put in place. Mr. Speaker, in examining the Barbados Labour Party Manifesto for 2003-2008 which is entitled "Every Bajan A Winner" there is a statement in the final paragraph at page 4 which says:

"This means that no longer should any Barbadian be imprisoned in poverty; it means that excellence in education, well paying and secure jobs, the highest

quality health care, peace and safety in comfortable homes of their own, and security and attention in their golden years should be the right of all Barbadians”.

Mr. Speaker, that is the premise they based their arguments on, so obviously we have to look at their record from that premise.

Mr. Speaker, also in the 1994 Manifesto, one of their national objectives as stated on page 5 speaks to the creation of a just, humane and compassionate society in which we respect our women and take care of our elderly.

Mr. Speaker, the question is, have they chartered a programme to clearly set out or to manifest what they placed in the preface of their Manifesto. Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the point that Government is about providing and promoting conditions for society's need and promoting conditions for human liberty and security. Indeed, we must accept that Government is necessary. In fact, a famous philosopher Thomas Hobbs said that Government is necessary. Certainly, without Government there would be no letters, no arts and no society and certainly life would become very short, brutish and nasty.

Sir, when we speak about politics, it is about the pursuit of justice for those who are in weak and social dependence. Sir, in this Green Paper we speak about the elderly. Mr. Speaker, the elderly in this country worked very hard. They built our agricultural industry and by extension our sugar industry. They worked hard on plantations in terrible conditions sometimes in order to get money to sustain their families. Therefore, directly and indirectly they have built this country economically and socially and built the moral and social fabric of this society. So what we on This Side are saying is that they deserve better treatment from this present Administration.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come home to the constituency of St. Philip North. Some time in June of this year before Hurricane Ivan an 83-year-old man and a 93-year-old man were affected by freak weather. Like every good representative I was there from the start. Sir, before that the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East, members from the Rural Development Commission, the National Assistance Board and some Barbados Labour Party supporters came and actually went on the roofs of those two persons homes measuring and promising that they would fix the houses for them within three weeks.

Sir, that is why I started my presentation by looking at their preamble from which they are saying that all Barbadians would receive the highest quality health care, peace and safety in comfortable homes of their own and security and attention in their golden years. Therefore, I am

asking, Mr. Speaker, should an 83-year-old man and a 93-year-old man who have contributed directly and indirectly to the moral and social fabric of this society be treated in that way? That was since June and we are still waiting for a house. The Honourable Member for St. Thomas had the audacity, the unmitigated gall and the temerity to get up in this House and speak about honoring thy father and mother and that is the treatment and justice that is meted out to an 83-year-old man and a 93-year-old man in the constituency of St. Philip North only because they have a Democratic Labour Party representative. Sir, could you imagine that they have members from the agencies walking around saying; “You feel Lashley gine get that house fixed, we in tell ‘wunnah’ to put in the Democratic Labour Party.” Sir, that is a shame and that is the politics of spite being practiced.

Asides.

Dr. W. F. DUGUID: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, as much as I appreciate the Honourable Member speaking about his constituency, we really cannot allow him to impute improper motives on the Government by suggesting that his constituents are being disadvantaged because the representative is from the Democratic Labour Party.

Mr. M. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, the interruption would never throw me off. I will continue to speak on the behalf of the elderly and the poor working-class people in the constituency of St. Philip North, so no interruptions would stop me.

Sir, they stand by their Manifesto which speaks to the creation of a just, humane and compassionate society in which we respect our women and take care of our elderly. But, Sir, where is the compassion, the care, the justice and the mercy? Sir, some of them go to church on Sundays so I would hope that they would pray and ask that the elderly be given their just due especially that 83-year-old man and that 93-year-old man.

Sir, I want to further say that that issue is linked to housing for the elderly. Sometimes we have senior citizens whose houses are destroyed by fire and other disasters, but the question is, whether they will have enough capital to provide housing for themselves or what scheme is in place to assist those who have lost their house in fires.
2.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it pains me. I go back to the Barbados Labour Party's 1994 Manifesto on housing, at page 27: “We will:

- Institute a form of compulsory home insurance in which Government takes responsibility for the aged and infirm;

- establish hotel-type accommodation for the immediate relief of victims of fire and other disasters;
- expand CERO's role to co-ordinate disaster cases."

Mr. Speaker, why should we accept anything that spills from the mouths of Members of the Other Side. Sir, in 1994 my good friend for St. James Central was a Member of the Democratic Labour Party, and a very vociferous one too. It is a fact that he led the campaign.

Sir, when we examine this document, there is clear evidence. None of them can get up and say that they did not say it. I challenge any one of them to get up and say to this Honourable Chamber that they have instituted compulsory home insurance in which they have taken responsibility for the aged and infirm.

Asides.

Mr. M. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, I am submitting that they have taken what they exhibit in this Manifesto, and as we know a Manifesto is a social contract between the people, and have breached this social contract, in particular with the elderly.

Asides.

Mr. M. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, this brings me further to the fact that they have done study after study. This is a Government of bare talk and no action.

Sir, before coming here, I visited that 83-year-old man this morning, who told me that he would like to get back into his home. Sir, I canvass my constituency on Saturdays. A lady said to me that she has worked hard for this country on the plantations, that she took rain and sun on her back and now look at the treatment this Government is giving to her. Sir, in the language of the elderly she said to me: "You go along, young boy, their day will come." Sir, I felt the pain in her heart.

Sir, In Government's Green Paper on Housing, at page 29:

"As at 1990, there were 9 649 physically-challenged persons in Barbados, with disabilities ranging from visual and hearing impairment, to loss of limbs and paralysis. Half of the physically-challenged population is the elderly. At present no special provision of housing on Government estates is made for the physically-challenged. Units are not designed to accommodate this group in terms of accessibility and use. In a general sense, the special needs of the

disabled are not being addressed and access to housing is restricted."

Mr. Speaker, although there is evidence that half of the physically-challenged persons in this country are the elderly, in fact, it has risen to about 10 000 or 11 000. There has been no evidence, no attempt or action, on the part of Government to look at housing estates and to make them accessible to the elderly who are physically-challenged. Sir, that is the attitude of this Government and I will say that based on their practice, it will never be done.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if when they examine their Manifesto and their performance, if they would be able to have a comfortable sleep when they go home at nights, after they have finished their journey in this Parliament when they look back at the treatment they have meted out to those persons in the evening of their years, the elderly and whether they have done what they should have done for that special group in this society?

Mr. Speaker, I want to submit that they speak further in their document – Green Paper, Towards a Society for All Ages – A National Policy on Ageing – the Paper speaks of a dire need for a national building code. Since, once again in their Manifesto, since 1994, the promise of a national building code.

Sir, this is a further breach of the social contract but after eight years and after being given a clear mandate by the electorate, a Government now commits itself to enforcing a national building code.

Asides.

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House. The Honourable Member is well aware that the Commonwealth Secretariat has provided a consultant to the proposed building authority. The consultant is in place and is reviewing the proposed legislation, which will be brought to Parliament very soon. Therefore, it is not true to say that nothing is being done. Sir, this is not one of those pieces of legislation that can be brought to the Honourable House without proper consultation.

Mr. Speaker, furthermore, the Honourable Member is reading from a Manifesto proposal of the Barbados Labour Party, and we have not as yet completed our programme.

Asides.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. M. A. LASHLEY: It is arrogance being displayed that people in this country must vote for the Barbados Labour Party forever and forever. Sir, we have to look at the contribution made by the elderly in this country and involve them in the community.

Mr. Speaker, we have to examine the environment that the elderly have to exist in and speak about the declining health care so clearly put by the Honourable Member for St. Philip West last week as well as examine the rising cost of living in this country and juxtapose it to their incomes.

Sir, I wonder if the Honourable Member for St. George North goes to the supermarket and whether he sees the prices of items. I wonder when we look at the disposable income of the elderly whether they have enough purchasing power to buy commodities at the prices that exist in the supermarkets today. Sir, this Government has truly presided over an environment in which the elderly would have a hard time to survive.

Finally, I want to say that all the compassion and humanity which they speak about is lacking in this Government and I challenge them to answer all the queries laid out in the Manifesto. They have promised shelter, clothing and food since 1994 which are the basic necessities of life and I want to know whether they have created the environment so that the elderly can truly enjoy the basic necessities and commodities of life.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, it appears from the mouthings of the Honourable Members of Her Majesty's Opposition that they would like to take this Government in a direction where the citizens of this country who have the care of the elderly should abdicate all responsibilities for their fathers and mothers and vest that care and control in the hands of a governmental authority.

Sir, I speak on behalf of all my colleagues when I say that we have no intention of going in that direction with them. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that a Government has a significant role to play in relation to settling our elderly in relation to providing for their needs but at, the same time, they too recognise that we have a heritage where Barbadians not only took care of the aged and the infirmed but there was a symbiotic relationship because at the same time of ensuring that our elderly were clothed, fed and housed, they also played a significant role in taking care of children who were too young to go to school, were ill or got home early from school.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the responsibility of the Government is clear but for too long Barbadians have abdicated the responsibility to be feeling, caring human beings and are waiting for the Government to take over that role. It is quite clear that in many cases where the elderly in Barbados have been neglected that there are in fact relatives who are alive, some of them quite prosperous, who have been content to allow their elderly relatives to go a-begging.

I feel that this Green Paper serves to sharply bring a lot of these issues into focus and will serve to remind the

right-thinking members of this society that the time has come not only for Governmental intervention but the time has also come for the citizens of this country to reclaim those characteristics that serve to differentiate us from people all over the world. Sir, I believe we must reclaim those characteristics that serve to ensure that our elderly had pride of place.

Mr. Speaker, on September 12, my grandmother was added to the list of centenarians in this country. She remains fully *compos mentis*, she is a little weak because of her age but, notwithstanding that, she has children who are now in their seventies, great grandchildren as well as great, great grandchildren and my 100-year-old grandmother is still the matriarch of our family. She continues to hold pride of place at every family gathering, her opinions are respected and we treat her in that way.

Sir, at many of the occasions when His Excellency goes out to visit centenarians, he is able to see that there are still some pockets in this country where people properly regard the elderly. I have had many discussions over the year with my grandmother and the information she gives continues to surprise me. She told me on my victory in St. Joseph that my great grandfather must be rolling in his grave but that, nevertheless, she was very happy for me.

Mr. Speaker, even today there is still much to be gained from interaction with the aged in our community but it is never a one way street because they too benefit from the constant intellectual stimulation and are excited about the opportunity to carry on the oral tradition that is part of our heritage and we are fortunate to still have many of these people alive.

I would like to join with many of my colleagues who call for an assessment of the talents of these elderly people to try to get them to share with us and to record for posterity where Barbados was one hundred years ago which we have only experienced through our ability to read in various books.

Mr. Speaker, from my experience in dealing with the elderly as an Attorney-at-Law I want to say that much of the neglect of the elderly happens because of ignorance.
3.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have a Mental Health Act, I would concede that it was passed in 1989 but I understand that its roots go far before 1986, that continues to be a readily available tool for those people who have care and control of the elderly but because of their state of infirmity or the fact that there are *compos mentis*, these elderly cannot readily access resources that may be available.

Sir, I have personal experience where elderly citizens have become very ill and have bank accounts and so on but they live in poverty and a state of neglect because people do not understand that there is legislative provision that would enable relatives to access these various monies and bank accounts and help to take charge of their property. There were many occasions where people came to me and said that someone has money on the bank but she can no longer sign at the bank because she is too infirmed and asked what they can do. Our Mental Health Act is still a good tool towards ensuring that the resources of the elderly continue to be applied for their care and control.

Sir, I had the privilege of being present with the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East when awards were being presented at a ceremony of the Community Computer Programme. I was struck by the fact that the oldest citizen that was present in that computer class was over 80 and the youngest person was approximately 14 years old.

It is an outstanding thing when the elderly in our community have pride in themselves, even in their old age, that they are still excited about knowledge that is available and when they still thirst for the opportunity to be brought into the mainstream of everyday activity. It is truly a remarkable thing to see someone in their 70s or 80s navigating the worldwide web but, perhaps, the reason that it is remarkable to us is because in incorporating the elderly in the day to day activity, it is often seen as an alien thing.

Sir, my cursory investigation tells me that the wealthiest people in the world are over the age of 65. These are people who still manage their financial affairs, build upon that wealth, create more opportunities for investment and, in fact, I believe that any of us who have had the opportunity to work with some old people would tell you that they are some of the shrewdest people when it comes to their financial affairs and things like inheritance and so on.

Sir, we have to recognise that when we talk about the face of the elderly we are not talking about a face of an infirmed individual or the face of an individual who has little or no resources. The elderly in this community come across every strata and we are constantly lauding our business leaders who are in their 60s and 70s for their continued good work.

I believe that this clearly illustrates that the elderly have been and continue to be for this country a tremendous source of experience and something that helps to keep us on track. In turbulent times they have been the source of wisdom, I believe, for many Cabinet colleagues and they have been the source of encouragement for everyone in here. Therefore, when we speak of the elderly we have to see them as a valuable resource.

Sir, certainly, that is how I see the elderly in my constituency and when we have our senior citizens events, we have these events not as a means to feed and fatten the elderly in St. Joseph but as an opportunity to bring the elderly citizens of my constituency together so that they have the opportunity to reminisce on the old times but also they have the opportunity to pass some of that wisdom onto those who are younger in age and greener in experience.

We would be foolish to pretend that ailments do not beset Barbadians when they reach their golden years but I am satisfied that the efforts of this Government are ensuring that health care remains affordable, medication remains free, that access to things such as ambulance service and so on remain in a way that we can be proud of them. I am satisfied that this Government is in the forefront in the efforts to ensure that the elderly in this society are well looked after.

Sir, it is all well and good for the Honourable Members of Her Majesty's Opposition to look to Manifestoes and say that we promised things and we did not deliver but that is like playing table tennis. We too can pick up the Opposition's Manifesto and point to numerous things in their Manifesto that, perhaps, may have seen a shift in focus but today we have the opportunity to engage in wide public debate on a solid document that has been brought before this Parliament, a document that will receive full analysis by all Barbadians so that as a people we are able to determine what path we want to take.

I firmly believe that the elderly will continue to be seen as an important resource, certainly for Honourable Members of this Government and I would encourage the Honourable Members on the Other Side to see them not as 83-year-old men or 73-year-old women but to see them as citizens who continue to be productive and have a lot to offer us.

Sir, I want to laud the Minister of Social Transformation for being in a place and time when he is able to bring a document such as this before this Honourable House. It is not a document that seeks to obfuscate the facts. It is not a document that seeks to sweep anything under the carpet. It is a document that clearly and sometimes starkly examines the situation of the elderly in this community and it speaks of efforts by a Government that is concerned, not about hiding issues or making things look pretty but a Government that is serious in its commitment to the elderly and disadvantaged in this country.

Sir, therefore, I close my comments by lauding the efforts of the Minister of Social Transformation and his team. This Green Paper will receive, I believe, wide acclaim in this country and I see it as a platform on which we can carry forward a sensible programme for the elderly, always

mindful that the platform that we set today will likely be the platform that serves to support us as we reach our golden years.

Mr. Speaker, with those few remarks I am obliged to you.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. James South.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest, some enjoyment and some amusement during the course of this debate over the last two weeks. In particular, as always, I am encouraged by the erudite delivery of my friend and colleague, the Honourable Member for St. James North, who is my constituency neighbour. I was a little baffled, I must confess, by the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central and the absence of substance waffles a breakfast pastry but when served up in substitution for speeches there are indigestible, that is what we got from the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central.

Sir, I note the comments made by the Honourable Member for St. Philip North. I often admire his enthusiasm. He cannot seem to get it to correlate with correctness, so let me help him, Sir. He indicated during the course of his speech that a manifesto is a social contract. This must be new policy which he is enunciating on the part of the Democratic Labour Party because the former Honourable Member for St. Michael South, the Honourable Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, made it quite clear that as far as he and the Democratic Labour Party was concerned a manifesto is not a social contract.
3.20 p.m.

Sir, the Barbados Labour Party, in pursuit of its recognition that a manifesto is a social contract, has been able in successive elections to produce documents which speak to our manifestoes and the extent to which these manifestoes have been fulfilled. The fact that the Honourable Member said that there are things incomplete does not mean that they are not going to be done. The truth is that nobody performs every single last sentence in their manifestoes, there is just never enough time. Mr. Speaker, the point is that it is This Side that regards a manifesto as a social contract. So while we are only a year into this term, there is much opportunity to fulfil the commitments made in the manifesto. Therefore, I am urging Honourable Members to read documents like these. This one is *Barbados Renewed* which was produced for the 2003 election but there are others which were produced in preceding elections.

Sir, I would not attempt, like the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central, to give half hour of an introduction but would try to turn to the nucleus of the comments I would wish to make today. This matter of ageing

in Barbados is a very serious one. So I want to commend the Honourable Minister for bringing to this Chamber a policy document which, because of the high life expectancy in Barbados now, will seek to guide us. This is a problem with which successive administrations are going to have to grapple. The fact that a Barbadian woman can expect to live for close to 80 years and a Barbadian man for close to 77 years really speaks to a range of policies that would have to be maintained in perpetuity to sustain a certain quality of living enjoyed by the population over an extended period. The Honourable Member must be commended for the fact that he sought to ask what are the strands of policy which need to be woven together in a fabric which would cover the policy framework and which would give body to it.

Sir, I must confess that the issue of ageing is also confronting me in a very personal way and I suspect that a similar thing is happening to other Honourable Members of this Chamber. Many of us are in our early 40s, some of us in our late 40s and some just past 50 and beyond. By comparison with others this is a relatively young Parliament but at mid-life, we ourselves are now at the stage where we must start planning for our own retirement. We are at the stage where many of us are seeing our parents age or have seen our parent pass on. Therefore, the issue of our own mortality confronts us and requires us as a nation and as policymakers to determine what policy framework Barbados needs if it is to cope with its increasingly large ageing population.

Sir, what we are seeing in Barbados is the kind of population bulge that mirrors that of developed countries. It is normal in developing countries for one, when one looks at the population pyramids, to see the peak in those up to 40 whereas Barbados is having the exact reverse of that where the population numbers are peaking in the post-40, post-50 and post-60 period. Hence, the largest number of our population cohort is in that group which is not working and therefore not earning income, which the health statistics are showing are burdened by chronic diseases such as high blood pressure with an increasing high incidence of strokes, other cerebral vascular diseases, diabetes and its related ailments. Sir, when one says diabetes one speaks of a range of illnesses from eye troubles, to foot troubles and organs break down. So you are seeing the largest number of your population falling into the group that needs the highest degree of care and the highest degree of State-funded expenditure in order to ensure that they have a comfortable standard of living.

Asides.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: These are the kinds of challenges that we, as a small developing country with inadequate resources, have to confront. In my view, the policy for the elderly looks at the issues and seeks to come

to solutions which would have to be practiced not only by this administration but by future administrations. Therefore, it behoves us as a Parliament to take this issue very seriously.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start at the point of framing the issue of ageing in the context of the family. It saddens me to see that part of the difficulty which faces Government in caring for the elderly is as a direct consequence of the changes in our social relations and the move from the extended family structure to the nuclear family structure.

Sir, let us understand that a large proportion of Government's expenditure is going on care of the elderly because in many instances we are refusing to look after our grandparents, our great grandparents and our very parents. Many elderly people are being exploited for their property and for their pensions for the general well-being of others, while when it comes to their care, we are abandoning them in Government institutions and we are leaving them in the Accident and Emergency Department of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and not going back for them. As family we are providing no kind of social outlet for our older members who we perhaps do not want to be seen in public with, the ones who can no longer go into Club Xtreme and so on, and we are forgetting that they are valuable members of the family too. This is a really important consideration.

The Psychiatric Hospital which is a larger institution than the Queen Elizabeth Hospital has more elderly patients in it than the Geriatric hospitals in Barbados. That is the reality, Sir. Many of them who are not ill or who have no mental disease but whose families who are aged and who families do not want them are left there as there is nowhere else for them to go. It is a sad reflection on us who purport to be a caring people that this is what our elderly citizens are coming to.

Sir, when I was Minister of Health I recall that we even had one circumstance in which an ambulance was called for and when it rushed to the site, they found old granny sitting down on her suitcase packed with clothes and cannot remember her name or address. She was left sitting in a vacant derelict building by family members waiting to be picked up by the State.

Sir, I want to urge Barbadians to go back to a sense of family care because our elderly people are the repositories of the wisdom of the ages and of our social norms and culture. They are the ones who help to pass on values and traditions and very often help to keep families together in times of crisis and to care for the younger members of the family. Sir, everybody these days is looking for a nursery to put their young people in but before we became such a sophisticated society it was the elderly in the extended family structure who cared for the younger members of the family and looked

after them with love and affection and passed on the traditions and the values of the Barbadian society to these young people.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, today many young people are eating at Chefette and at Kentucky. They do not know how to cook cou-cou because there is no grandmother in the house to teach them, neither do they know how to bake pone. Therefore a lot of the tradition and cultural heritage, including culinary skills, are being lost because the old people are pushed out of homes.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that there is a certain framework which Government has to put in place, which is outlined in the policy document. So far the Ministry of Social Transformation has implemented the Senior Games to give seniors a sense of self-esteem and self-worth, and for them to give vent to their remaining energies, creative outlets, talents and competitive spirit. This initiative has grown in popularity because it was so needed.

There are very few activities where people of a certain age in Barbados can go or and can congregate with persons of similar age or of like mind. There is no 'bashment' parties for grannies. There is no place where they can go and, in my view, part of what Government needs to do is not only establish facilities for residential care but also facilities for respite care and for short-term care.

If some families had the support of the State, while those persons go to work, it would be possible to take their grandparents to a facility where that person could participate in a number of activities until they can be collected in the evening, or where the householder could take that grandparent to a facility where they can be cared for until that persons returns for them. This is something which I am urging the Honourable Member to look at and to pursue as part of our approach to the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, we have increased funeral grants, pensions, given tax relief, introduced the drug service in an earlier administration, increased pensions and provided a range of support systems for the elderly but we must go further. We now have to look at arrangements that will cater to both ambulatory and non-ambulatory care for the elderly. We must look at having retirement villages which will constitute communal facilities with separate bedrooms or little cottages where persons can retire into smaller spaces, rather than remaining in larger homes.

Sir, we must not fool ourselves. Even when some civil servants come to a certain age, they can fall into a state of gentile poverty by not being properly cared or by not having the proper care arrangements to support them as they age, and as the need for space becomes less. Therefore, Government has to look at flexible housing arrangement with respect to how we deal with our elderly.

Mr. Speaker, there has to be the actualisation of the policy plan to have a housing framework, specifically for the elderly. We need to look at, and I have it under contemplation, the notion of having some degree of houses set aside in housing developments, specifically for the care of the elderly, so that they are surrounded by vibrant communities into which they can be drawn.

Mr. Speaker, it was to my regret that an elderly member of my constituency, in a housing area where one would think there would be persons all around him, could have died in his home and remained there for days, and nobody noticed that he was missing or that he had not come out. It is sad that we are now living in such insular existence and nobody had ever noticed that old man.

Mr. Speaker, this is a sad reflection on the society where this is happening all the time, where elderly persons are falling in their homes, injuring themselves, cannot reach the telephone, no family member checks on them, or nobody in the neighbourhood cares. Sir, while Government is being asked to carry some of the burden, the reality is that the burden belongs to all of us as a society and requires a change of attitude.

Mr. Speaker, I have no children but I am totally prepared to contemplate a situation that while in my old age, I am able to share a small cottage, perhaps with the Honourable Member for St. Michael East, who might be my friend by then.

Asides.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is not outside the realm of possibility because sometimes a lot of older people have a life-long friend or companion, whether male or female. Sometimes it may be someone with whom one may have had a sexual relationship or sometimes it may be someone who is known from school days, or who might have grown up in the same village.

My father had a friend who died earlier this year. They were both C. B. Rice tailors together. Therefore, we must contemplate a situation where two friends might want to move out of a larger environment and live together in a smaller cottage in their last days of companionship. That could be the type of facility that we make.

Mr. Speaker, I also believe it is necessary that we give financial incentives to specific institutions to encourage them to put plans in place for the care of their elderly. It is my view that organisations such as the workers' unions and credit unions that have large memberships, ought to have a vested interest in the long-term care of their members and, in this regard, should be given incentives to put in place retirement homes or villages for the elderly so that their

members have facilities in which to retire. In that way, homes would be freed up for the younger members of the family to occupy or to rent and the elderly would be moving into places where there is a greater degree of supervision and oversight, where they are cared for, and where the spaces would be reduced.

Sir, very often people build large houses not thinking about their retirement. They then find that a year has passed and they have not gone upstairs, or that two or three months have passed and they have not gone into two of the three or four bedrooms of the house. Therefore, we must give incentives to a variety of social organisations so that they will take some of the burden off Government because apart from the Soroptimist Club and those persons in the private sector who are doing it, a lot of the burden for housing the elderly falls directly onto the Government when there are other institutions whose natural membership would make them a natural option for retirement facilities in the future.

Mr. Speaker, another organisation, the Barbados Association for Retired Nurses, is one such organisation that has established a retirement facility at Prospect, St. James, which was formerly in my constituency but is now in that of the Honourable Member for St. James West. Therefore, other organisations must be brought on in this way and encouraged to do similar things.

Sir, equally at the level of Government, it is important that we establish proper rehabilitation facilities. Very often as we age, we are more and more fearful of leaving home, particularly after daylight hours. We are getting reduced quantities of exercise and there are no facilities when we suffer strokes or become disabled by the consequences of diabetes. There are no facilities for proper rehabilitative care. 3.40 p.m.

Sir, this is not only a problem that affects the elderly because there are a large number of younger people being injured and made infirm through motor vehicle accidents because of the rising incidences of violence in our society and we do not have proper rehabilitative care facilities in Barbados. It seems to me that this is one of the usages to which the St. Joseph Hospital building can be put because there is urgent need for proper rehabilitative care in Barbados. Sir, the elderly would benefit from it significantly because many of them are seen walking the street with their limbs drawn from the effect of strokes, having lost limbs as a result of diabetes or just the sheer bent and shuffle of old age resulting from osteoporosis whereas if these people were put into proper rehabilitative and physical care programmes, many of their physical problems could be relieved, reduced or avoided.

It would be remiss of me not to make this point. Mr. Speaker, under the sale of the terrace units, while it is being suggested that no specific arrangements have been made for

the elderly, as part of the policy package for the sale of the terrace units, arrangements have been made to ensure that elderly persons who may not get funding in the private sector are able to access concessionary funding from the National Housing Corporation to allow them to buy their units.

Sir, there are a number of persons who have laboured for many years and were not able to own homes. In the next two weeks, we will have an opportunity to debate in this Chamber the Primary Homes Programme and much of the misinformation being put out by the Other Side, stung as it is by the creativity of this new policy initiative, will be put to rest.

Mr. Speaker, under the Primary Homes Programme we have negotiated with one of our finance partners and one can now get a mortgage with this finance institution up to any age. Sir, this means that if you are 70 years old, you can still get a mortgage from this finance institution. There are opportunities available to the elderly either using the concessionary financing available from the National Housing Corporation or using funds in the private sector. Sir, as I said before, there will be the opportunity for Honourable Members to look at this programme in greater detail when we debate the new housing initiatives.

Sir, in my view, one of our shortfalls as a society, under various administrations, has been the absence of public education for ageing. As I get older, I observe a lot and I am fascinated by the fact that at the most important stages of one's life there is little education or preparation. I make this point in respect of parenthood because there are few opportunities that prepare one for parenthood. Sir, in many instances, people are not prepared for marriage because there is no pre-marital counselling and many people go into marriage unprepared. Equally, all of us, unless we die, become old and infirmed but we are not prepared for the difficulties of ageing in whatever way it manifests itself, whether in relation to the impact that menopause has on women and marriage or the relationships in which they are involved or whether it has to do with how people adjust mentally to the fact that they are no longer in control of their physical being in the way they used to be before.

Sir, most of all, there is little financial planning for old age and people seem to believe that reliance on a pension from Government will suffice in a world where the value of money is becoming less and less. Therefore, we have to make sure that we put proper public education and sensitization programmes in place that equip people for dealing with the problems and challenges of ageing.

Sir, I have heard young people speak harshly to older people which speaks to the greatest disrespect and must be painful to those older people. I believe if there were more public education and thrust towards greater sensitization of

the members of our society relative to ageing that some of these incidences would be reduced.

Finally, I noted that one Honourable Member during the course of today's comment made the point that there should be no taxation of pensions. This is a matter that can be debated and people of goodwill are free to disagree. However, we need to make sure that able-bodied people of all ages are working and contributing to the tax net and the national insurance pool. The reality is that with more and more people getting to retirement age but making no contribution, the range of services offered by the National Insurance Office are under threat. In this regard, where there are problems at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital with an absence of trained and qualified nurses, nurses who are retired for instance, should be brought back to work to fill the gap.

Sir, I am not suggesting that young people should be put out of jobs but where there is an absence of trained persons in the labour force, where there is a need for the service they can provide, we should bring elderly people back into the labour pool so that the society can benefit from the taxes, national insurance and the skills which they bring to the workforce. Sir, we should not write-off people who are physically and mentally capable and want to continue to make a contribution to the society in which they live.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member could you conclude?

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I believe that this policy document is an excellent framework for us to contemplate, discuss and execute effective policies relative to the elderly in Barbados. I look forward to and commit the Ministry of Housing and Lands and the Environment to playing our part in ensuring that there are adequate facilities for the ageing in Barbados and that we come up with new and creative ways for housing the elderly. I give to the Honourable Minister of Social Transformation and his staff my fullest support as he seeks to implement this policy.
3.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker vacated the Chair and Mr. Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. Michael South East.

Hon. H. F. LASHLEY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am compelled to close this debate, as I began it, with a deep sense of humility and justification.

Sir, this debate gives me an opportunity to reflect on my decision to enter political life. It was a conscious

decision to play a part in helping all Barbadians but particularly those we consider to be the most vulnerable groups and to help them improve the standard of their lives. It is to this end that I want to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for giving me this opportunity to do so.

Sir, at the same time I want to use this occasion in this Honourable Chamber to apologise to the two elderly folk in St. Philip, who I visited with the Honourable Member for St. Philip North, in their time of need only to learn that our agitation for assistance for them has not yet been forthcoming. I want to say that the Rural Development Commission, which has responsibility for this particular matter, will have this matter expedited as soon as possible. It is unfortunate that incidents like these sometimes take a prolonged period of time to be expedited.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during this debate the Government presented its policies and programmes aimed at empowering the elderly in our society. I believe that the contents of this Green Paper will achieve its main objective. It was our objective to present ideas and programmes that were conducive to providing a better way of life for our elderly citizens. It is also our objective to stimulate discussion that would enhance and strengthen this Green Paper, as acknowledged by all Honourable Members who spoke in this debate.

Sir, I believe that from the vibrant debate enunciated in this Honourable Chamber and the public discussion among ordinary citizens on the road, the objective regarding ageing contained within the Green Paper on Ageing certainly will be achieved. Our final and most important objective is to see the implementation of the programmes and policies referred to in this document, ultimately resulting in better circumstances for older persons in this country.

Sir, this is the primary reason, I believe, all of us in this Honourable House have entered political life to help in the process of bringing tangible change to the lives of those who are most in need, to help those who have been on the periphery of our social policy and to bring their standard of living to a level that is in synchronisation with the standard of living to which all Barbadians have grown accustomed.

Sir, we remain committed to finishing this course, where all people in the society are provided with avenues and opportunities for growth and participation. The elderly in our society are productive in all aspects of life and can be more productive once we create the environment and give them the opportunity. We must also recognise their potential and contribution to the well-being and survival of their families, community and country. Indeed, it is often said that the test of a civilised society, like ours, is how best we treat our elderly and those vulnerable and marginalised groups within our society. Sir, I certainly can rest peacefully

knowing that if Barbados is to be judged by this criteria in the future, we, as a nation, would pass with flying colours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Green Paper on Ageing must be seen as a radical and revolutionary development in social policy formulation in this country. Sir, I reiterate that it seeks to provide a very comprehensive and focussed approach to issues pertaining to our elderly citizens. I must confess that I like the connotation put forward by the Honourable Member for St. Lucy when he said that he preferred to have the senior citizens referred to as experienced and knowledgeable individuals giving back to the society.

Sir, this is an idea that can be examined bearing in mind that all the views of Honourable Members in this Honourable House will be taken into consideration as we seek to bring the White Paper to this Honourable House. This Green Paper seeks to prevent discrimination of any kind being meted out to our elderly and to ensure that the human and civil rights of elderly persons are provided, protected and promoted at our national level.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it provides a framework for all sectors of our society to be involved in the national enhancement of the lives of our elderly citizens. It also supercedes the Old Age Pension Act of the 1940s and the provisions made under the National Insurance and Social Security legislation. This Green Paper is cognisant of Barbados' international obligations and commitments in ensuring that this aspect of society does not lag behind others in the development process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in April 2002 at the second International Conference on Ageing in Madrid, Spain, Barbados made a presentation on the ageing phenomenon and articulated the main themes of the current Green Paper, which was being drafted at that time. At the conclusion of the conference, a political statement was made and an International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted by over 170 countries, including Barbados.
4.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the International Plan on Ageing calls for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels in all sections so that an effective national response could be facilitated to the challenge of population ageing which maximises the inherent potential presented by the challenge. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the aim of the International Plan on Ageing was to ensure that persons everywhere be facilitated to age with security and dignity and continue to participate in their societies as citizens with full and equal rights.

Sir, Barbados attended the regional inter-governmental conference on Ageing under the theme "Toward a Regional Strategy for the Implementation in Latin America and the

Caribbean of the Madrid Plan of Action”, which was a follow-up to the second international conference which was held in the same Madrid. The regional conference was held to facilitate, to expedite and articulate a common implementation strategy by the Latin America and the Caribbean grouping at that meeting that was held in Madrid. The conference in Madrid produced a strategy that could be pursued by regional governments to ensure a synchronised regional approach. The outcome of both conferences underscored the relevance of the Barbados policy position which was itemised in this Green Paper to the local realities as well as reflecting sensitivity to international and regional policy positions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Barbados is certainly doing the right thing and will not retreat from designing a professional and progressive framework for elderly persons within this country of ours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this proposal reflects the undergirded philosophy that has propelled all of the programmes made available to elderly persons in Barbados. Mr. Deputy Speaker, according to the World Health Organisation, if ageing is to be a positive experience, longer life must be accompanied by continuing opportunities to health, participation and security. The World Health Organisation has therefore adopted the term, ‘Active Ageing’ to basically express the process for achieving this vision. Active ageing is the process then of optimising opportunities for health participation. Active ageing then applies to both individuals and population groups. It allows people to realise their true and full potential for physical, social and mental well-being throughout their lives’ course and to participate in society according to their needs, their desires and certainly their capacity.

The word active refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civil affairs not just the ability to be physically active or just to participate in the labour force. Older persons who retire from work and those who are ill or lived with disabilities can remain active contributors to their families, their peers, the community and certainly to this nation. Active ageing therefore extends healthy lifestyle, expectancy and quality of life for all people, including those who are weak, those who are frail and certainly those who are in need of care, as they age. Mr. Deputy Speaker, health was spoken a lot about as a very important component of ageing. Health refers to the physical, mental and social well-being as expressed in the WHO definition of health. Thus in an active ageing framework, policies and programmes that promote mental health and social connections are as important as those that improve physical health.

Sir, several initiatives have already been undertaken by the Ministry of Social Transformation, as the State’s premier social service Ministry, with responsibility for elderly

persons through the National Assistance Board. Therefore, I would like to give this Honourable Chamber a brief outline of some of these programmes. Let us examine the home care programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the end of September this year a total of 937 persons consisting of 370 males and 567 females were in receipt of this service. This represents a significant increase over the past two years and indicates the relevance of this community care approach to this service delivery programme. This programme, above all others, demonstrates the importance of having services delivered to clients across Barbados. It prevents increased demand on the Geriatric Hospital system which as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is already overburdened. Out of that total I spoke to just now, 447 of them live alone and are receiving that particular service under the home care programme and are solely dependent on the National Assistance Board. The figure further indicates that at present 852 recipients benefit from cleaning services, 754 receives washing assistance and 371 have meals prepared for them by the home care staff at the National Assistance Board.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this service is now available seven days a week. Before we came to the Ministry of Social Transformation, it was available three and sometimes five days a week. Further development of this programme is being proposed in an attempt to cater to the increasing number of persons who would need it as we go on in ensuing years. This then means that staff training and development are critical components as Barbados seeks to discharge its mandate to a growing elderly population.

Sir, this then brings into it other issues of accreditation and certification of our home care staff which is engaging the attention of the National Assistance Board. A lot of this training exercise happens at the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, the University of the West Indies School of Continuing Studies and other institutions which are undertaking such training.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would now want to look at the recreational activity. A lot has been said in this Chamber during this debate about the importance of recreational programmes. The important point I want to make on this is that it is a centralised programme which offers a wide range of activities to approximately 600 participants on a weekly basis at 13 such centres across the national divide.
4.10 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this programme is a reflection of all the aspects of ageing, as outlined in this Honourable Chamber and in the Green Paper. It has major potential, and I suppose Honourable Members in this Honourable Chamber who have distinct business acumen, would note

that it has major potential as an income generating strategy for elderly persons, as well as contributing to the Arts and Craft industry and to the tourism, product of Barbados. This aspect will certainly be explored during the next financial year when we come here to look at the Estimates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is against that background that I would like to compliment Help-Aged International which has a subsidiary body in Barbados, which, for decades, has been doing wonderful work for our elderly persons in Barbados, whether it is in community or otherwise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now turn to institutional accommodations. There are three small-scale entities which provide accommodation solutions for elderly persons who are experiencing homeless challenges. One is the Sir Clyde Gollop Night Shelter for homeless men. There are plans to further upgrade this facility and to have it as a kind of re-entry point into society for these persons.

It is against this background that I want to use this occasion to thank all Barbadians who have contributed to the Share-the-Shelter Programme, where ordinary Barbadians from all walks of life came to Heroes Square to support a cause for the homeless in Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this occasion, I wish to say that the Ministry of Social Transformation will shortly be launching the project for the homeless at Eckstein Village, Tudor Bridge. I would also want to take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to Sir Clyde Gollop, a man who all of us know has pioneered the Barbados Family Planning Department. He was a man of great courage. I would say too that he was a man who was ahead of his time. I would like to call him one of the greatest champions of social practitioners.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the behalf of the Ministry of Social Transformation and all Honourable Members in this Parliament, our sincerest condolences to his wife and family.

Sir, there is also the Black Rock Hostel which provides mid-term accommodation for our elderly. We also have the George Daniel Home, which is in the constituency of St. Michael South East. This facility is currently looking to expand to the eastern side to provide further accommodation for the elderly within a community environment. I want to assure Honourable Members that this is not relegated only to the elderly from St. Michael South East.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is then the Vauxhall Senior Citizens Village. We have all had very long discussions on that. I wish to say that I know it represents a first for Barbados but we are going to be implementing a number of innovative and challenging programmes at that facility.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what did not come out in this debate was that the Vauxhall Senior Citizens Village has a

community centre which will integrate those persons who are living within the immediate community of Vauxhall with the residents of the village. I am sure that those residents of that particular geographical area are extremely familiar to you and I know that you know of the programmes that we are trying to implement at Vauxhall.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would like to know when it would be started.

Hon. H. F. LASHLEY: It will be started very shortly, Sir. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the State must continue its existing housing programme but the Green Paper reflects a continuous developmental approach to the issues of accommodation.

I was heartened by the Honourable Minister of Housing, Lands and the Environment, who agreed with us that it was impractical to construct all villages. We are now looking at a more integrated approach to have the elderly suited to their own and fitted within their own environment. In short, Government will create and provide an enabling environment to facilitate private sector and non-governmental organisation involvement in this challenging aspect of elderly care.

We have heard exhaustive talk about the National Senior Games, which will happen again. We are looking at how best we could enhance those games. We realise that we will have to make sure the games remain very community and nationally oriented and that they must serve as a vehicle for our seniors to fully participate.

Sir, I say that against a background because the games sometimes are a very costly exercise. Sometimes it brings me back to the fundamental philosophical position that the development of this country cannot, and should not, always be measured in dollars and cents but in how best we could treat and enhance the lives of our citizens, particularly our elderly persons. Sir, sometimes if the cost of any people-centred or people-oriented project escalates, I have no problem, so long as the taxpayers of Barbados money is being spent in a practical way. I see this as an investment in our elderly across Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to encourage Barbadians to get encouraged within their particular communities and form more senior citizens community groups across the island. There is one in particular in my constituency. The Honourable Members have spoken and have complimented the Kiwanis Club, the Soroptimist Club, the Lions Club and others, that are doing good work within the communities. Sir, what I want to see is more community-based organisations (CBO's) being formed within the respective communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is at this point that I want to draw attention to a very fundamental concern which negatively affects issues of development in the Caribbean as it relates to our elderly because it would have an overall impact on the region on how we deal with issues relating to our elderly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am referring to the Latin America and the Caribbean groups during international developmental discussions. Sir, the Caribbean and Latin America are two distinct and diverse groups. To my mind, they are linked by our geographical location because it is convenient for the developed world to do so. As a result of this linkage, the problems and issues of the Caribbean become subsumed by the larger countries of Latin America, notwithstanding the fact that many of the countries in the Caribbean have far more vibrant economies than many of the countries in Latin America.

4.20 p.m.

Sir, we are denied adequate assistance and our problems are not given enough attention because of this ill-conceived alignment and it is time that the developed world recognise the Caribbean on its own. Sir, the elderly in the Caribbean have their own diverse needs, issues, policies and programmes that are applied to Latin America and certainly will not work within the English-speaking Caribbean.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we consider that the Caribbean is made up of islands with different needs and concerns and now under the leadership of Owen Arthur we are charting progressive path with the formulation of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, it is quite clear that if we allow ourselves to be constantly aligned with Latin America, it would only serve to disadvantage the Caribbean now and in the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the solution will obviously require a two-pronged approach.

First, developed countries should recognise that their reporting will be severely inaccurate if they continue to view Latin America and the Caribbean as one region.

Secondly, the only way to successfully achieve separation of Latin America and the Caribbean is for the Caribbean political leaders to commit the political will to advocate and lobby for this most important and necessary separation.

Sir, unless we are able to achieve this separation and define for ourselves the most important issues on the Caribbean agenda such as what we are discussing in this Chamber today and present our position to the rest of the world, then the needs of the most vulnerable needs in our society, particularly our elderly citizens in this region, will never adequately be reflected at a global level.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I want to use this occasion to thank all Honourable Members who have contributed to this debate. I also want to inform Honourable Members that this is not the final document, that it is the Green Paper and not the White Paper. We now have to take all comments made by Honourable Members, civil society, churches, everyone who has an input to make to this document and then carry it back to Cabinet for discussion and approval. It then comes to the Ministry of Social Transformation, goes to the particular group and comes back to this Chamber in its final, total form.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to implore that all work together to achieve the noble initiatives outlined in this paper, not only for the development of the elderly but all of our citizens. Sir, there can be no political divide on this issue because we have a responsibility to the people who elected us to come forward and contribute to this process of development as we seek to build a more inclusive society for all the elderly.

Sir, we have to stand firm knowing that we are our brothers' keepers and create a better society for all ages in Barbados knowing that no obstacle is greater than the cause.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this concludes Government Business for today. I beg to move that this House be adjourned until October 26, 2004, at 10.00 a.m. I want to signal to Honourable Members that on that occasion it is proposed that a piece of legislation pertinent to the Caribbean Single Market and Economy will be discussed.

Hon. H. F. LASHLEY: I beg to second that.

The question that the House be adjourned until October 26, 2004 at 10.00 a.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. Deputy SPEAKER adjourned the House accordingly.

4.27 p.m.

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