
THE

House of Assembly Debates

(UNOFFICIAL REPORT)

PARLIAMENT 2003 – 2008

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Pursuant to the adjournment, the House of Assembly met at 10.15 a.m. on Tuesday, July 25, 2006.

PRESENT

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

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

Mr. L. R. TULL, Q.C., M.A. (Oxon.)

Hon. Dame B. A. MILLER, D.A. B.C.H., (Senior Minister, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade)

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND, B.A. (Hons.) Dip. Ed., LL.B.

(Hons.) (Lon.), LL.M. (Leic.), J.P. (Minister of Labour and the Civil Service)

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

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

Hon. N. A. LYNCH, B.Sc., M.B.A. (Minister of Tourism and International Transport)

Hon. A. P. WOOD, B.Sc., M.Sc., M.Phil. J.P. (Minister

of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports)

Hon. R. R. FARLEY, B.Sc., J.P., (Minister of Housing and Lands)

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

Hon. Dr. 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.

Hon. H. F. LASHLEY

Mr. R. St. C. TOPPIN, LL.B. (Hons.)

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN

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

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY, Q.C., LL.B. (Minister of Economic Affairs and Development)

Hon. T. A. PRESCOD, B.A. (Minister of Social Transformation)

Hon. J. J. S. ATHERLEY, B.A., B.Sc., J.P. (Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office)

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

Hon. C. A. MASCOLL, B.Sc. (Econ.) (Hons.), M.A. (Public Finance) (Minister of State, Ministry of Finance)

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL, LL.B. (Hons.), L.E.C. (Attorney General and Minister of Home Affairs)

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 Reverend Canon Ivan Harewood.

Mr. SPEAKER: The House is now in session.

MINUTES

Mr. SPEAKER: The Minutes of Tuesday, July 11, 2006.

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes for the Honourable the House of Assembly for its meeting of Tuesday, July 11, 2006, which Minutes have been circulated, be taken as read.

Hon. Dame BILLIE MILLER: I beg to second that, Sir. MR. SPEAKER: If there are no corrections or observations, then let these Minutes stand confirmed.

H107/10:20

Sequence 2

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY HIS HONOUR THE SPEAKER

Mr. SPEAKER: I am to report to this Honourable House that I am in receipt of the following documents:

1. Accounts and Statements for the month of February 2006 from the Accountant General.
2. Special Audit Reports on the Urban Development Commission and the Rural Development Commission by the Auditor General.

PAPERS

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to lay the following documents:

1. Duties, Taxes, and Other Payments (Exemption) (Barbados National Oil Company Limited) Order, 2006.
2. Customs Tariff (Amendment) (No.2) Order, 2006.

Hon. R.C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to lay the following document:

1. Draft E-Government Strategy.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Honourable Member for St. Michael South and Minister of Tourism, I am commanded to lay the following document: 1. The Shipping Incentives, (Dreams Investments Limited) Order, 2006.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg to give notice of the Road Traffic, (Amendment) Bill, 2006.

FIRST READING OF BILLS

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the following Bills be read a first time.

1. Small Business Development (Amendment) Bill, 2006.
2. Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2006.
3. Final Appropriation (2005-2006) Bill, 2006.

Hon. R.C. EASTMOND: I beg to second that, Sir.

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

SUSPENSION OF CERTAIN 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. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: I beg to second that, Sir.

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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 11 – RESOLUTION TO TAKE NOTE OF THE DRAFT E-GOVERNMENT STRATEGY.

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

Hon. R.C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, it would definitely appear that I would be leading this Resolution as the Minister of Civil Service, but of necessity throughout my discourse, at certain points I would have to make reference to so many different areas, that I might very well be speaking as more than the Minister of Civil Service. I might very well assume my cloak as Minister of Labour, Minister of Training and other things as well. Sir, the reason for this is obvious, because in the context of our debate today, we are considering Government's draft, E-Government Strategy, which relates a lot to the exploitation and use of technology in the process of governance. So far-reaching is technology's arm, that it is almost inconceivable to perceive or conceptualise any situation in today's world where technology does not have a place.

I would invite all Honourable Members, who follow me, to do their utmost to focus the debate on not just the narrow issue of e-governance, but on what they see as their vision for Barbados in the context of Barbados' exploitation of technological equipment.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission I define E-Government, as the use by Government of information and communication technology, to extend and enhance its delivery of information and services to citizens, businesses and employees. Sir, of note, E-Government is part of a larger programme of Government for reform, improvement, change and greater efficiency at all levels of governmental operation.

Sir, having defined what E-Government is, the benefits we perceive to flow from the continuing use of technology in Government are as follows:

-Speedier, more efficient and effective delivery of services to meet the expectations and requirements of citizens and businesses.

- Citizen empowerment through access to information.

- More friendly, convenient anytime, anywhere citizen services.

- Increased employee productivity.

- Improvement in Government-to-Government interfaces.

- Increased revenue growth and a concomitant reduction in operations costs.

These are the benefits.

Sir, a while ago, I said that among the benefits we expect are more friendly, convenient, anytime, anywhere citizen services. That line is an invitation to Barbados to understand that the context of the operations of today's world, a twenty-four-hour economy, is an absolute prerequisite and imperative for Barbados' economy. I will address that issue at some point during the course of this introduction.

Mr. Speaker, having mentioned the benefits, I now want to consider specifically what Government really expects to accrue from the use of e-governance and, indeed, from the greater use of technology across the board. In the context of the preparatory work which the 19-person committee did, in terms of drafting a policy for Government's consideration, the overall vision statement in respect of our programme of E-Government, is to empower the citizens of Barbados by improving the convenience, speed, efficiency, quality and variety of services and information delivered by Government.

Sir, e-governance and, indeed, the widespread use of technology are designed to empower Barbadians, to get on board and see themselves as being part of a process, by which ultimately we in Barbados must be known to be persons who are businesslike, must be known to be persons who are efficient and must be known to be persons who are forward-thinking.

10.30 a.m.

Sequence 3

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House 107, Sequence 04, 10.30 a.m.

Continuation of: Hon. R.C. EASTMOND:

Sir, out of the ultimate programme of E-Governance, it is expected that we will have a better delivery of services to citizens and businesses. We will also have greater productivity and efficiency, in the operations of Government agencies, as well as greater transparency and governance through broadening public participation in the process of administration. Those are the overall goals.

Sir, in terms of particular and specific objectives, we intend to establish a structure for the management of the E-Government programme. We intend also to put in place, the technical infrastructure and architecture to support the various E-Government initiatives.

We propose also, Sir, to ensure that adequate resources, technological human and financial are provided, to ensure the successful implementation of the E-Government programme, as well as to develop a communications and marketing strategy to ensure that customers, both external and internal to the public service, understand the vision, the changes that will occur and the tangible benefits to be derived from E-Governance.

Sir, this is the introduction to what I propose to be a presentation, clearly crafted and designed to entice, not only Honourable Members of the Honourable Chamber but Barbadians as a whole, to become more sensitive to the potential of technology, not just to change things in the short term, but indeed to revolutionise the way we do business in Barbados, and do business in Government as well.

Sir, we have a situation where this Government and various spokesmen have repeatedly called for something from our citizens, which I will repeat here. Indeed, Sir, I have heard certain spokesmen for Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition also reiterated this particular desire, which I will mention now.

We in Barbados, both sides, want to see a multi-skilled labour force. We want to see a multi-skilled Barbadian. We want to encourage today's 18 year olds, not to specialise as a lawyer and restrict himself or herself to one career, but to draw on other skills, to make himself or herself more marketable in the world of work, more competitive in the workplace and, indeed, more competitive in the wider world.

Sir, if the Government is challenging our people to be multi-skilled, if the Government is going to be consistent and morally correct in its approach, the Government itself has to be multi-dimensional in all its functions and the Government must be multi-disciplinary in the way in which it goes about doing business.

Sir, this is one of the reasons why I stress the whole idea of doing business anytime. For if the Government is going to be multi-disciplinary, we have to conceptualise a situation where Government departments cannot see themselves as limited in activity, scope and range, to hours between 8.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. Sir, in a situation of a highly complex international business and financial, and economic environment we have to be able to stand up in this world, and to compete on the same turf, and on the same ground as our competitors. Sir, however much we talk about international and regional integration, it is ironic that as countries cooperate, and as blocs integrate that very much you get the situation, where the very members of a blocs, both partners and allies are often rivals, among themselves, when it comes to matters of business and trade. This adds to the complexity of what we see in today's, international, global, business environment.

As I talk about the environment, Sir, let me look to position where we are, in terms of sensitising this country to what is transpiring globally and what is transpiring regionally.

Globally, Sir, we are noticing that there is a truss on economic efficiency. Sir, whatever we may say about the Chinese in Red China, and whatever standards they may practice that we do not pursue, China so far, has captured the imagination of the world, by positioning itself to benefit more from trade liberalisation than any other country. The primary reason it can do that, Sir, is by managing operating cost, maximising efficiencies and producing at very/very low rates.

I repeat that, Sir, internationally, you have a country like China, which is able to achieve economic efficiencies by managing cost. There are other countries that are able to manage their cost of production. Sir, in any country, whatever the value of the dollar, whatever the level of inflation, there is no way that in the year 2006, going on 2020 and beyond, that any country can put up its arms in despair and say that it is okay for one country to achieve its economies this way, but we cannot achieve.

We cannot like Pontius Pilate ever say, "Lord, not I." We in this Barbados must be alert to the reality of the global trading environment, where efficiency is the watch word. If we are going to be able to compete internationally, we have to be able to achieve the types of efficiencies and manage our cost in such a way that our competitors do not capture what we would want to hold on to, Sir. It is a fact that so far as the trade in goods is concerned, Barbados' contribution to international trade is nihilistic.

It is a fact, Sir, that so far our contribution to services, Sir, is rather more significant. Globally, Sir, our contribution to global trade is but a fraction of total trade but at the same time, when we compete globally in

services, we have to emphasize brand, brand quality and efficiencies. We must also have a marketing strategy, Sir, that would entice those who do business with us to continue, and entice newcomers to be involved with Barbados.

Internationally, Sir, we also have a number of rules and regulations, orchestrated and administered through the WTO, which constantly stress that in an era of free liberalised trade, there are particular standards that are expected. A close analysis of these standards suggest, once again, Sir, that in it all, efficiency of production, speed of delivery, and economies at the level of cost, are very much the paradigm.

Regionally, Sir, we have the CARICOM Single Market. In a context where particular Member States of this Single Market come together, under the general rubric of practising economic integration, but in a situation, Sir, where there are certain complexities in regional economies, complexities that point to the level and strength of currencies, complexities that point to the level of ordinary costs, complexities that point to the level of labour costs, we in Barbados had better watch out. Sir, by the time we encourage greater free trade, in circumstances where others in our very region, our neighbours, have particular advantages over us, we can, at a high level, trumpet our desire to be the brother, sister or ally of another CARICOM country. The reality is, at the end of the day, that if we do not achieve the types of economies and efficiencies that technology can engender, we may be very badly off.

Sir, somebody might say during the course of this debate that already the point I am making is manifesting itself. Somebody might say that in the context of Barbados' trading relationship with Trinidad and Tobago, in the context of how Trinidadians invest in Barbados that clearly, on any objective assessment, Trinidad definitely at this point has the advantage.

The private sector of Barbados must not necessarily copy everything the Trinidadians have done and do it the Trinidadian way, but our private sector in particular has to position itself to be...

House 107, Sequence 04, 10:40:14

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Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: ...creative, to have long-term visions and to be energetic and enthusiastic in managing business activity so as to be able to maintain our share of regional trade.

In it all, Sir, Government has a role to facilitate. However, Government can only facilitate if Government is capable of doing so. Mr. Speaker, as the speed of progress

continues, Government has to maintain a position where Government itself is fully on board, and where in addition to facilitating, Government should set certain examples.

Later on, Sir, I propose to highlight particular strategies which Government has already done by way of this question of the use of information technology and the use of methods of e-governance in the Public Service. Sir, I will also point to particular incentives that have been granted to this country and look at particular policies that have been emerging, especially out of the financial statements of the Honourable Member for St. Peter in recent times.

Sir, Government always has to be forward-looking. Sir, bearing in mind where this country should go - and time really forbids me from exploring all that has happened fully - this Administration, since 1995/96, has offered some incentives to the country to alert the country to the need to be information technology-sensitive, to be computer-literate and also to the need to see where technology can lead.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be exhaustive in mentioning all that Government has done by way of offering incentives to our population, but permit me to say that effective April 01, 2004, the value added tax on computers was removed by this Administration as one of the incentives. Sir, also effective April 01, 2005, the VAT on computer peripherals was removed. In his Economic Statement of 2003, the Honourable Member for St. Peter announced that tax incentives would be provided for software development in the area of cultural industries, particularly cultural gains.

Sir, one year after, in his Economic Statement of 2004, the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Member for St. Peter announced that Section 12 (h) of the Income Tax Act, Cap. 73 would be so amended to include the following as qualifying activities for special income tax relief and special incentives. Some of these qualifying activities, if you permit me, Sir, are information services, education services, investment management services and e-commerce services.

Sir, a lot has transpired and no doubt during the course of this debate the two Honourable Members immediately on my right, as either past or current Ministers of Education, would no doubt deal with the EduTech Programme. The Honourable Member for St. Thomas who has been with it for all times would no doubt deal with it. The Honourable Member for St. Joseph, a former specialist advisor to this Government on e-commerce would no doubt have a contribution to make. The Honourable Member for St. Michael East can speak to the whole question of the Community Technology Programme. Sir, I am satisfied that all Honourable Members in here have some particular

contribution to make consistent with what has happened under their watch.

Sir, I mentioned the incentives, I now come to how Government has so far use information technology in the administration of Government. The list is not exhaustive because in a situation where we do things incrementally, it often is very difficult, at short notice, when many things have happened over a period of time to pull together all of it within two or three days. Sir, we hope that with the use of greater information technology in the future that the constraining factors that prevent us from being able to pull together things clearly, store speedily and retrieve speedily would be obviated.

Sir, to mention Government's involvement in information technology in this country, let me remind all Honourable Members of this Honourable Chamber that in 1996, Government undertook a plan to improve the efficiency of monitoring, controlling and reporting on the financial activities of Government. Sir, the focus of this initiative was the computerisation of the tax administration and public expenditure activities of the public sector. Sir, the software package chosen for this computer effort was the SmartStream product suite. Sir, SmartStream came in about or after 1996.

Sir, in the year 2002, this Government introduced a Community Information Technology Programme, the primary goal being to provide effective access to technology and to the internet and to allow such access to be obtained by the economically disadvantaged groups in society.

Sir, I do not propose trespassing on this very much. I think it is very well within the remit of the Honourable Member for St. Michael East. Suffice it to say, that one of the more laudable things about our Community Information Technology Programme is that it has the potential to be all-embracing. It can occur outside of the formal educational system. It can occur outside of the school system, which it actually does. It can attract the working class boy from Jemmotts Lane and the working class girl from Cats Castle. It is definitely attracting the humble and lowly maid from Weston. It is attracting the carpenter from Black Bess. It is also attracting old people who are determined to live out their years in dignity and peace consistent with their desire to serve God.

Sir, the old people have all demonstrated an interest to such a degree that they make me feel tempted to say that as they work in this Community Outreach Programme, they are practising the ancient Latin maxim, *laborare est orare*, to work is to pray. Sir, I am heartened that since 2004, a not insignificant number of people over 70 years of age in this country have been involved in that programme.

Sir, there is also the much maligned EduTech Programme, which so many Honourable Members of this Parliament can speak about. The Honourable Member for St. Michael North East no doubt would have a contribution to make along with other Honourable Members.

Sir, I just want to say that Government has ensured that we in Barbados do not stand in peril of being left behind in an increasingly complexed and complicated regional and international environment.

Sir, having mentioned SmartStream and the Community Outreach Programme for the use of computer education, permit me to say that in the context of the administration of Customs this Government has introduced the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) to facilitate full electronic document processing.

In addition, we have created an enabling environment, and this is important, for private sector investment. This is a project geared at improving Government's performance in promoting and facilitating private sector investment by linking ministries and departments so as to facilitate and make easy a collaboration and a sharing of neutrally common information.

House 107 Sequence 5

10.50 a.m.

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Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, certainly when Mr. Grantley Smith and his predecessors were at the National Insurance Office, whatever the current circumstances are, before we saw any real problems in the last year or two, the National Insurance Office was able to position itself, to be one of the early Government departments - if you want to treat it as one such - that got on board, in terms of developing an electronic filing system, online transaction processing systems, and document and workflow management systems, along with decision support systems.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a few of the efforts which have preceded today's debate. The question naturally arises as to where are we to go in the future. We are speaking about a situation where Government intends to promote and to foster e-government. We are contemplating a situation, where this document was laid in this Honourable House some hours ago, where it sets out in draft an E-Government Strategy.

Sir, where are we going? I must say that, over time, between 2003 and recently, a broad-based 19-persons Committee, attracting membership from agencies, such as

the Data Processing Department, the Inland Revenue Department, the Ministry of the Civil Service, the Bridgetown Port and the Customs Department, were able to sit and reflect on a number of occurrences and to make a number of proposals.

Sir, quite recently, Cabinet decided to adopt the strategies contained in this document now laid in this Honourable House. Sir, having agreed to these strategies in principle, Government will now, as the next stage, set up another committee to fast track processes and to position this country for even more.

Mr. Speaker, I am, therefore, asking that this Honourable House take note of this particular strategy. I also propose that, in the foreseeable future, when circumstances permit, to update this Honourable House as to acts preparatory and acts continuing, which will allow us to achieve the ultimate objective of seeing Barbados become, in a very quick period, the most developed small island State of the world. That is an objective that is achievable. Many factors point to its achievement but part of the process must necessarily involve technology and e-governance.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to say a few words about Government's policy, not only in relation to improving efficiency through technology, but to improving systems and efficiencies generally. The document very much consists of fairly articulate notes, which have been properly put together. Sir, Government intends, in the near future, to bring a new Civil Service Act. We are hoping to complete all consultations on this Act. There have been enormous consultations occurring over time. The consultations have been intense. The consultations have been productive. The Act itself presents three or four great areas that need further exploration and monitoring and, Sir, hopefully, certainly by mid-January, 2007, I would want that the new Civil Service Act would come to this Honourable House and would take effect.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things about the proposed new Civil Service Act, is its emphasis on efficiency in Government. The new Act has adopted efficiency as the watch word, as the veritable standard, and as the paradigm. Sir, in the context of the functioning of the Public Service Commission, in the context of the management of particular Government departments, the efficiency is crafted to achieve the type of effectiveness, to ensure that we in Barbados are very much modern in our outlook, forward-thinking in our approach and professional and persistent in our steps towards making sure that we, as individuals at the individual level, are ready and that at the national level, the country as a whole, is mobilised towards greater efficiency and greater productivity.

Mr. Speaker, the overall objective of the proposed new Civil Service Act, which, as I said, is not far away from being debated in this Honourable House, is to revise and to consolidate the law relating to the administration of the Public Service, for the purpose of achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in the management of that service and for matters connected to the administration of Government in this country.

Mr. Speaker, let us note that beyond merely regulating the Civil Service, there is a suggestion of empowering the Civil Service and making it more efficient. In the early post-Independent period, Civil Service Rules, through a number of the Civil Establishment Acts and a plethora of legislation, stressed discipline and the regulation of the Civil Service. Sir, discipline and the regulation of the Civil Service will never be abandoned, but along with those standards, efficiencies and effective services, will now, for the future, be the paradigm.

Mr. Speaker, in time, Government is going to have to assume the responsibility of sensitising the Public Service, in terms of waking up all public servants to the reality that governance is not only about the ministrative administration but that there is an economic and commercial aspect of governance as well.

Mr. Speaker, governance is not merely the setting of rules and the maintaining of law and order, Government has a facilitating and empowering role and, therefore, it would be unthinkable that in the year 2006, that Government could come up with systems, that Government could step up the stairs, then pause and come back down, when the stairs beckon further for Government to get involved in greater commercial activities and greater economic pursuits.

Mr. Speaker, for the future, we have to conceptualise a system of governance, where things such as revenue collection must be facilitated and be transparent; where certain things, such as slippages and leaks in the system can be detected. Sir, in a situation of old fashioned manual manipulation of systems, time is consumed enormously, time is wasted. Very often, when the old manual files go missing, action cannot be taken sometimes for years. Very often, the files have to go through so many stages, which can be by hand, by messenger/ porter, in a situation where action would be delayed. Sir, in a situation of e-governance and e-commerce is being done online, we can achieve speed, efficiency and the effective delivery of services in a moment.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the question of where we are, 13 degrees north, as compared with Japan, South Africa, England, or the United States of America. If these countries are taken as some of our trading partners and we do not have a system of rapid online contact and

communication, we can lose opportunities. Sir, it is as simple as that.

11.00 a.m.

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Hon. R.C. EASTMOND: Sir, we can also stand condemned as going to the Olympics to contest a hundred meter event in an old-fashioned horse and buggy.

Mr. Speaker, nowadays, in a world where your neighbour can supply the very service that you can, in a world where your ultimate business partner expects you to be professional and quick in responding, we in Barbados cannot shut down at 3.30 p.m., 4.00 p.m., and 4.30 p.m. Sir, I speak not only constrained but encouraged by the principle of collective responsibility and to that degree, I am not usually permitted to contradict the policy of Government but the truth is that there are Government departments in Barbados that do not collect revenue after 3.30 p.m. This is no criticism of this administration but a standard that has been going on from the time John F. Kennedy was a teenager. It is a standard that was going on when Grantley Adams was 40 years old. It is a practice that was going on when Gertrude Eastmond was contemplating political life.

Mr. Speaker, we have had systems in this country which we have repeated and replicated simply because they were in existence. You ask a particular officer why something is done a particular way and he says that it was always done this way. Sir, that can no longer be the norm. It cannot be the norm that you have an urgent file to deal with and when action is expected at 3.15 p.m., you put the file in the hands of a messenger who has to phone and trace the vehicular transport of the Ministry and when he finds the transport to get through traffic, park the vehicle miles away, by that time it 4.30 p.m. and the opportunity is loss. Sir, I am making the point that electronic governance and standards can fast-pace things.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, we in Barbados must never be perceived to be so conservative and resistant to change as to throw new ideas through the door. I speak in no despotic nor dictatorial mood but, Sir, in the context of the twenty-four-hour programme, we have to have it in Barbados but by being not a despotic, tyrannical Government, we are still consulting those with and interest. We have consulted the major social partners like the employers and the trade unions and there are other agencies involved with connections on a potential twenty-four hour programme and the consultations are ongoing.

Mr. Speaker, at the moment, there are five or six stakeholders in Barbados with an interest in the twenty-four-hour work programme who are still deliberating on it.

I am happy to report that in the context of where transport would matter if we do business at 10 o'clock and 11 o'clock at night, I am happy to say that the Barbados Transport Board has already reported its position on a twenty-four-hour programme. It says quite clearly that the Board is prepared to be flexible because no Government can force a twenty-four-hour programme on a country in the absence of having engaged that country because tyranny and despotism have no place in the body politic of Barbados.

Sir, for those with potential to be tyrants and despots who may be shielding under the cloak of democracy planning some day to topple it, let them know that tyranny and despotism are not norms in Barbados, that the democratic process must not be ever abused by persons who are clearly going to be despotic and who pretend to be democratic when they do not yet hold power. Sir, I refer not to the Democratic Labour Party.

Mr. Speaker, we have to ask ourselves whether or not Nassco Limited in River Road does business with Toyota, Japan and the answer is yes. If Nassco Limited, a Barbadian company, trades with Japan, then Japan becomes a trading partner. There is a huge time difference between Japan and Barbados. Sir, suppose there is something for which Nassco Limited must contact Toyota, Japan, are you going to write a letter and post it to Japan?

Mr. Speaker, I recall an incident of bureaucracy which I will never forget. When we do business the same way over and over again, we are not only conservative and we are quite antediluvian in our outlook. Mr. Speaker, let me share an example which you might have heard about or even experience, I want the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central to listen. Sir, there was an old, dilapidated school in Barbados years ago, which had a log book into which everything had to be entered. The school was also brought under some form of control when the great monolith called the Ministry, which knows everything, had certain expectations of the school.

Sir, a heavy downpour of rain descended on the roof of the school one day and the people inside were drenched. The principal sat down and wrote a letter to the Ministry of Education highlighting the problem of the flooding of the school before he considered coming outside to see whether the children could get home. Sir, he was protecting himself because he said that the Ministry expected it. He also used to say in those days that the Ministry of Education was omniscient and that it knew everything. The Ministry may even have known how many Eclipse biscuits were in a tin which came from WIBISCO. Sir, the greater point is this. Where officers are stymied and constrained by systems of governance which tell them to so abide by slow-moving rules and bureaucracy is very much ruled-based, officers in protecting themselves and their territory, by abiding by the

rules, will perpetuate systems of antiquity and antediluvian behaviour which ultimately achieve nothing in the name and for the sake of progress.

Therefore, this notion of doing it now in 2006 because this is the way it was done in 2002 and 1993, that standard must end. Sir, many a marital partner in 2005, would have heard from the other partner that variety is the spice of life and that you cannot eat cou-cou every day. You cannot be too 'samey-samey' in an era where you have to be flexible and dynamic. Sir, Government itself has to avoid being labeled as being too 'samey-samey'. Government has to avoid being labeled as being the protector and principal practitioner of bureaucracy. In times the rules must so be changed that even though a bureaucracy will remain, certainly at the level of its overarching nature, principles like what are enshrined in the new Civil Service Act will help the bureaucracy to be able to assume greater efficiency in its function.

Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in bringing this Resolution before this Honourable House. During the course of my presentation I said that almost every single Honourable Member on the frontbench would have a contribution to make about technology, information technology, e-commerce and about e-government.

Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that when we are moving flexible working hours and a twenty-four-hour system, we will not force these things on the public until we are sure what is the position of the public and what are the expectations of the public.

107/11:10

Sequence 7

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. R.C. EASTMOND: We are engaging the people. Sir, sometimes we have to hasten slowly in the interest of democratic engagement. Sometimes we have to do that.

Sir, when we look at our people in Barbados, we have a highly educated, highly bright, highly rational and highly logical population; a population that is to be encouraged to avoid complacency. We must not see ourselves in Barbados as so having arrived that we cannot go and learn how to operate a computer. We must not see ourselves as so having arrived that we are about to retire from the public service in two years, therefore, we should not pick up computer education. We must not see ourselves having arrived, as to think that we somehow make it on our own, by using somebody else's skills to help us when confronted with a technological challenge.

I conclude by saying that from a purely philosophical point of view, time wise in creation where mankind interacted closely with nature, mankind assumed a pastoral role and interacted with nature. I am using mankind generically to mean humankind. Naturally, in this context, mankind interacted with mankind, meaning that humankind interacted with humankind. Humankind, since the industrial revolution, has had to interact with certain forms of technology, the railway, telephone, all these things resulted from the industrial revolution. There is no question that information technology is in the manufacturing industry, but because of its peculiar character, it is not normal to treat information technology, as pure industrialisation or as the product of industrialisation. It is normal to create a special area or niche for information technology and treat it as a highly specialised area.

Sir, now the question is, in the same way that humankind had a positive and mutually rewarding experience interacting with the pastures, fields and animals; in the same way that humankind had been able to interact with the motor car, airplane and railway, based on where this world is going, it is now clear that there is evolving an inseparable relationship between humankind and information technology.

Mr. Speaker, it is unthinkable, in the year 2008, for any persons between age six and sixteen to see a world without computers. They are some of us in here who would have known a world without computers. They are some of us here, who in 1974 would have seen a huge thing called a computer, where today's computers are smaller and more efficient than that huge computer. Sir, that huge old computer, that had to be set up in a computer room, is now very much a relic of the ancient past, very much a prehistoric contraction; outdated. That is one of the things we have to bear in mind.

Mr. Speaker, in an era of computer technology, we can become obsolete. If I, depersonified us, and used the term obsolete, obsolescence is one of the things that people note in using information technology. We human being in here, and I am dehumanising somewhat, should not be ever labeled obsolete. Obsolete is a word to be attached to things, not to people.

Mr. Speaker, we have had technology available in this world in 1996, that by today's standard is obsolete. We have people in this country who, whatever their station in life, must not risk being labeled to be corporeal antiques or ancient relics of a far past. We have to step on board. We have to be modern in our approach, and as I said, this relation between information technology and ourselves as people is one where there is already a bond. I do not go by the word of the cynics and skeptics who say that man has become duped by information technology and that man is

enslaved. Sir, man there can accommodate woman, in line with the Interpretation Act.

Sir, I would not say anything to the effect that we are slaves to the computer, but the computer can be made into the most willing of our servants if we know what to do. The computer can be made into one of our best gadgets and devices if we know now to exploit it. Technology knows no bounds. Sir, unfortunately, you get technology good for war. We in Barbados do not want that at this stage. We want enough to protect ourselves but we do not have any designs upon anybody to attack it. Sir, technology is so far-ranging, that you can have technology you can use for your own benefit.

Sir, technology in all forms can be like a knife, either you can use your knife to stab somebody, which is wrong, or you can use your knife to peel an orange or cut something in the kitchen. Similarly, this world can use technology either constructively and positively or can use it to achieve bad design.

Mr. Speaker, Government will ensure that its early steps towards the establishment of a data processing unit in this country, will eventually unfold and demonstrate a commitment to change with the times; a commitment to ensure that our future is secure; a commitment that is designed to promote this country as forward-thinking and a country well poised and positioned to assume the status of a developed country.

Sir, with these few remarks, I am obliged to you. Thank you.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central.

Mr. R.D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, one cannot but note, as the Honourable Member for St. James North led this topic, his obvious enthusiasm, relative to this topic, as Minister responsible for the Civil Service, at this time. He sees it possibly as the panacea for the revolutionising of the public sector. Of course, we would want to caution that it is only a tool.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commence the Democratic Labour Party's response to this draft document laid before this Honourable House and the accompanying Resolution, by simply stating to this Parliament ...

Mr. SPEAKER: Order, please.

Mr. R.D. JONES: Sir, by simply stating to this Parliament that the use of the term of E-Government is a misnomer, since governance cannot be executed by the mere presence of technology, regardless of how effective or efficient that technology is in making the provision of

services or the availability of goods more accessible to the people that Government serves. Government is affected through the work, attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours of the people whom they are set to serve. That may be at the level from the minister or the Prime Minister, for that matter, down to lowly bureaucratic functionary who has the charge of making Government more effective.

Mr. Speaker, what do I mean in this context by Government? I see a Government as a set of formal institutions, and we know what these institutions are, under our construct, through which a country and its people are ruled or governed. It must have the capacity to initiate, to mediate and to facilitate the conduct of citizens in such a manner that they are free to organise their business, without necessarily infringing the rights and responsibilities of others. It would mean that a Government has to be so positioned that the total welfare of citizens is at the forefront of its actions, policies, laws and behaviours.

Sir, then the question of E-Government...

11.20 a.m.

Sequence 8

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

House 107, Sequence 09, 11.20 a.m.

Continuation of: Mr. R.D. JONES:

As such, then, the question of E-Government could not be easily facilitated within such a definition. Sir, if one goes on to speak to the easy terms of E-Governmance, then the notion of E-Government also fails to gain currency.

Governance as a concept in its widest sense, refers to the way in which any organisation, or in this case, the Nation - because we are speaking about the public sector, the country - is organised. Therefore, it refers in a wider sense to the way in which the organisation or this entity, which we call this Nation, is run. It includes all the processes, the systems, the policies and the controls that are used to safeguard the interest of the citizen. Sir, at the end of the day, that is what Government is all about, the safeguarding of the interest of the citizens. Therefore, within that kind of context, one would have to look at the whole notion, as it is postulated within the Draft E-Government Strategy.

The notion also arises, Mr. Speaker, within this whole context, of good governance..It is moving from the mere talk of Governance to the talk of good governance, something which we in this country would want to continue to achieve because it is an evolving process. There are still challenges to governance, either by those who

govern or by those who are governed, within the context of Barbados.

Sir, the notion of good governance emerges as a consequence, as we seek to place new structures, new or different systems, changing or emerging structures to help with the whole process, in the management of the Barbadian society and economy. Therefore, if we could use an example as provided, in this case, by the World Bank, in the whole notion of governance - it is not a name, Mr. Speaker, that I like to refer to because of my particular political orientation, but it is one which I found quite useful - and it is saying that good governance is epitomised by open and enlightened policy-making, a bureaucracy, imbued within a professional ethos. I believe that somewhere the Honourable Member for St. James North was trying to make that point, though not successfully, and he sees it as the Executive arm of Government, accountable for its actions, and a strong, civil society, participating in public affairs, and all behaving under the rule of law; all, Sir, not anyone creating the kind of fragmentation, which will make the whole notion of good governance problematic.

It is therefore not happenstance that the coinage of the term, E-Government, seems to have gained wide currency and has become embedded within the language of state bureaucrats, within the world over. It is also a notion, as well, which is becoming embedded within the minds of Government, and those who are concerned with this whole concept.

Sir, part of this embedding has to do with the Government of the State encouraging a facelessness to their actions. I want to repeat that point. Governments the world over want to encourage a facelessness to its actions, behaviours and attitudes, so that citizens would become confused as to who or what are the agents or instruments that are affecting their daily lives.

Sometimes, these things, Mr. Speaker, are brought very squarely on the agenda, because Government wants to hide its behaviour. Government wants to hide its action. Now, it is easier for a citizen of Barbados, going to the window face, going to the chalk front, interacting with the bureaucratic functionaries of the State, to feel some severe problems because you are seeing a face, you are picking up an attitude, et cetera. But on the click of a mouse or some other instrument, which will give you access to whatever, that might not necessarily be possible, so there is an encouragement to the facelessness.

Mr. Speaker, the bureaucracy in Barbados, the public service of Barbados is a continuum of the Executive of the State. It is part and parcel of the whole management of Barbados and, therefore, by the creation of the facelessness, some people say that might or might not

become real. Persons see it as the decline of civilisation by the presence of these types of technologies, within the world space. Maybe, it is how we use it, maybe, it is how we apply the technology, without affecting our spirituality, humanity or emotions. Maybe, it is the way that people see the inanimate as, in fact, becoming the real part of themselves or of their being.

Mr. Speaker, it is within the context of this facelessness that I am talking about, that one might hear that it is not the person who is providing the service that is ineffective and inefficient, but that it is the computer which is giving the problem.

Mr. Speaker, one cannot blame the technology. People interface with the technology. They are the people who make the technology work, so let me up front, Sir, debunk the notion of some E-Government in charge of the lives of persons. This is not true. Government is composed of people, whose actions, laws, attitudes, behaviours and policies have a direct and consequential repercussion on the lives of citizens, on the lives of our people in this case, since we are locating the E-Government strategy within the heart of Barbados.

Therefore, people have an effect on people. It is Government with a face. It is Government with an action, a behaviour, a law and a policy, which has an impact on the citizens of this country. The E-Government strategy as proposed, must therefore be seen as only a tool, nothing else, in facilitating the work of the Government. Maybe, Mr. Speaker, it might be proper or better to use the notion, rather than of E-Government, maybe something as Government Services on line, (GSOL), that may be the kind of acronym which can be utilised.

Sir, to me it suggests that we are not looking to technology to be the instrument of the face, of the contact of human beings, on which human existence must still continue to prosper and still continue to grow, rather than the denial of spirituality and the denial of humanity. It is nothing more than a process, Mr. Speaker, through which citizens of Barbados are called to interface, one of the many systems, with which citizens interface. Let us not give it a life and vibrancy that can only be found in the multiplicity and complexity of human life.

There is no divide, Mr. Speaker, that I am postulating here, as man utilises his technology, but you would recognise, Sir, that I am making a direct and deliberate claim for the humanity in all of the processes that we have, Sir. There is nothing, Mr. Speaker, on this earth greater than the human kind, greater than the humanity, greater than that personal touch, greater than the evolution of the human being, into the kind of person that we would like that human being to be, and I hope that I am not postulating. Mr. Speaker, I am not known to mount the

pulpit, Sir, and speak in such tones. I speak mostly sedately when I am teaching then.

House 107, Sequence 09, 11:30:14

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Mr. R. D. JONES: Sir, when governments unfold such schemes, as in this instance, the e-government strategy and processes, they tend to wrap them up in hyperboles, high-sounding phrases and catch lines. Mr. Speaker, that did not escape the erudite, strong and verbose pronouncements of the Minister of Labour and the Civil Service, the Honourable Member for St. James North. Sir, I am familiar with his penchant for the strong use of language, and it did not escape him this morning.

Mr. Speaker, there is a hyperbole always mixed up around these systems. The same can be said of the Draft E-Government Strategy.

Sir, I hope the Honourable Member for St. Michael South would listen, because it is an area that he is not particularly conversant. Maybe he should have listened to the Honourable Member for St. James North.

Mr. Speaker, the vision as stated here, and it is contained within the e-government strategy, is to empower the citizens of Barbados by improving the convenience, speed, efficiency, quality and variety of services and information delivered by Government. Nothing is wrong, Mr. Speaker, with speed, efficiency, quality and variety of services. In fact, it is something that as one who loves the various technologies, as I interface with them each and every day...

Sir, let us consider the notion of empowerment within that context. This kind of vision statement has been said about almost all systems which Government has stated that it would implement. Wherever you go, there is always empowerment written in to the vision or the mission statement, so this is nothing new. Of course, that empowerment of those who work and interface with the particular system does not seem to be realised. Maybe it is because it is not realisable within the context of what we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, at the outset there has to be much pomp and ceremony attached to the unfurling of the project. That is part of the empowerment that they are talking about. Mr. Speaker, a few years down the road, one would find that the more things change or appear to change, the more they remain the same. That is because the change did not take place first within the correct area or arena. It has to do with the change taking place first and foremost at the level of the citizens of Barbados, at the level of Government ministers, at the level of the Civil Service bureaucracy and

at the level of the private sector actors. Sir, that change has to take place at the level of the people who are to receive the service and those who are to give that service.

Mr. Speaker, here in Barbados we have been entertained with buzz phrases such as Public Sector Reform. You would hear the Minister of Tourism and International Transport, when he mounts his pulpit, speaking very well about Public Sector Reform. Another buzz phrase in action is the National Initiative for Services Excellence. These are laudable and excellent concepts being brought to bear. There is to be a national competitiveness and productivity by Bajans, yet we still import everything from China. Other buzz phrases are achieving competitive advantage, raising the productivity standards of Barbados and Barbadians, and the development of public sector charters, which are all part of the whole exercise of vision statements and mission statements.

Mr. Speaker, as you enter some offices, you see a well-done, well-inscribed mission statement, which is beautifully done in calligraphy. Mr. Speaker, that is all you get. No one stays committed to that vision or that mission statement and therefore there is massive failure up and down across the length and breadth of Barbados. Mr. Speaker, when all is said is done we do the same thing, that is essentially what I am saying.

The culture, Mr. Speaker, of the service provider, in this instance, the culture of the Public Service, remains the same. The presence of technology, regardless of how simple or how sophisticated it is, will not change that culture, it takes people. Mr. Speaker, you will find that I am putting emphasis on the humankind, on people, properly led and managed to change the culture of an institution or an organisation. The Public Service of Barbados is an institution. In this context, I am really here talking about an institutional or organisational culture rather than the broad component that we refer to as culture in Barbados. Therefore, a substantial change in their actions, attitudes and behaviours must take place in order for any change to be effective and to prove effective, that is what has to happen.

Mr. Speaker, culture is therefore the sum total of the learnt behaviour within the organisation, which allows it to carry out its actions and activities in a particular way, which is different from that carried out in another organisation or institution even though on the surface the organisation or institution may appear similar.

Mr. Speaker, human beings organise the culture of that institution. Therefore, the concept of e-government can succeed or fail on the rigidity of the cultural norms and values, ways and means of doing things which are part and parcel of the Public Service syndrome, a syndrome which

is fostered or bolstered by the leadership and managerial practices which Government wants public service leaders and workers to follow. That is what happens. It is fostered by a belief that I cannot do because someone mightier than I am is looking on from on high, so I cannot implement, cannot do or cannot process what is there for me to process, so I am gridlock.

To some extent, Mr. Speaker, this is not a condemnation of our Public Service. It is to look at the reality and to say let us change and let us understand what we are talking about and therefore change that reality to the kind of reality that this strategy in its draft would want to speak about. It is leadership and management of the process, Mr. Speaker, that is of absolute importance in the management of the state of affairs in Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, our Public Service is a system in which decisions are not taken but are shuffled between one functionary and another for the fear of being told you were wrong or for the fear of upstaging or showing up someone else further up the bureaucratic ladder. This is what happens. These are the realities of our existence within this country. Maybe it is also the reality of the existence of others in some other space. Mr. Speaker, we are not concerned with others in other spaces but with our own in our own space.

House 107 Sequence 10

11.40 a.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Mr. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, decisions which can be taken in a few minutes, can spend some time being passed from one desk to another, with much time elapsing. Sir, the Honourable Member for St. James North also spoke to that, so I am not alone on this matter. The Honourable Member works therein and is a part of the leadership and the management of the Public Service of Barbados. It is also the recognition of the Honourable Member and, therefore, who am I, standing as one who receives the services, not to comment on a system that needs changing.

Mr. Speaker, e-governance or e-government will not change that. It will not change those rigidities, those attitudes or behaviours, regardless of if one fills out the application online for whatever service. Sir, filling out that online application form is part of the process but someone still has to take a decision as to whether or not the application is to be approved. The technology does not do that. It is done by people who have to take decisions. If the application is filled out online, someone still has to see it. In other words, one still has to read the application and take a decision on it.

Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is that the computer nor the technology cannot take the decision. That decision has to be made by a human being, even though it is a monetary transaction. In truth and fact, if it is a monetary transaction, one has to pay greater attention. Someone still has to peruse that transaction, to see that it is properly allocated. That system could be at the Inland Revenue Department, the Customs Department or at any other agency of Government. I am not saying that we should not facilitate the process. The point is greater than that.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, the notion of the empowerment of people, has more to do with them feeling satisfied that the questions which they ask, the enquiries which they make, and the issue which they confront in their daily lives, are quickly and speedily addressed. They must not be made to feel as though they are being pushed around or as we say, 'mamaguided' or 'colly foxed'. They must be made to feel that the State and those who function on the behalf of the State or the private sector, would treat them with the same dignity and respect with which others are treated, whenever they seek to access a service or good within this society. They need to be treated with the same degree of dignity, the same respect and with the same priority. They do not need to feel that they are any less important because of the fact that when they are standing in line, wanting to transact business, there might be someone standing behind them, who might be called ahead. These individuals sometimes remain silent and believe that they are being looked down on because for them to raise a voice, is be be denied even further within the society.

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows of what I speak. This is not a manufacture of mine and even though I like manufacturing, this not one in which I am engaged. I am talking about experiences, about realities and, therefore, empowerment of people will not take place within that reality, either of the citizens going seeking the service or the service provider. It will not take place within that reality and, therefore, I am glad that the Honourable Member for St. James North has taken the stance, which he has, in relation to this particular debate.

Mr. Speaker, as a notion, when we look at the area of empowerment, it is saying people through to the various social processes that one must take control of their lives. It fosters power in people's lives, in their communities and in their societies, by acting upon issues they define as being important. They see these issues as being important to them and not to us, in this Parliament. They make the determination how they wanted their individual lives to be chartered. Therefore, all we are and must see ourselves as, is nothing more or nothing less than facilitators. We must not see ourselves as lords of all whom we survey.

Mr. Speaker, e-government or for that matter, the service provider, cannot empower them. Therefore, the broad goals of the Draft E-Government Strategy cannot be achieved within the current framework of a public service, that finds it difficult to adapt to change or to adopt change, neither can it be achieved where the workers within that sector do not feel empowered to take action, to make decisions or even worst, do not believe that the action, which they take and the decisions made, would be appreciated and not deprecated. They feel that they have to look over their shoulders because somebody is going to spank them, either the inline supervisors or even worse, one is who is superimposed at the top within our current democratic structure.

Mr. Speaker, E-Government Strategy speaks to a number of goals such as better delivery of services to citizens and businesses. Sir, there is nothing wrong with that. We want better delivery all the time. We want more effective, efficient and speedier delivery. That is the nature of life today, to some extent.

We also want greater productivity and efficiency in the operations of Government's agencies. Sir, there is again nothing wrong with that. It is laudable, and the 19 good men and women of Barbados, who worked on developing this Draft E-Government Strategy, must be applauded on the recognition of functional areas in relation to the goals as outlined.

Mr. Speaker, the draft also speaks about notions which have been spread across the length and breadth of Barbados. It speaks of greater transparency and governance, through greater participation in the governmental process. Sir, it sounds excellent. It sounds beautiful. It has brilliant phrasing. The capturing of good, strong words such as governance, transparency, broadening participation. These are all beautiful words. In fact, if they were poets, I believe they should have included a number of poems dealing with such notions. Some of these notions, as spread out, are both quantitative and qualitative. The first two I spoke of are, in fact, quantitative. There could be a measurement applied to see if the strategy used is being effective, to see if there has been any improvement in Government's services. The strategy has to do with speed and efficiency. It can do that. There is nothing wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I support that, I love technology. Sometimes I believe I might be a bit caught up too much with love for technology, than with love for other things and so I recognise the failing. Therefore, I can speak about the failing because I recognise it.

Mr. Speaker, as an example, let me use the Immigration Department. I am not, at all, 'picking' on those good men and woman, who stand at the chalk-face of the security of the State. I will not attack them. I will not

call them xenophobic. As an example, one applies online for a passport. If the current 14 days are reduced to two days, that would be quantifiable. That is measurable. Therefore, persons would not have to go two or three times to access a passport. That is a service taking place with some degree of rapidity. Citizens might see this as Government delivering a service, at a speedier and, therefore, more efficient rate to them.

Mr. Speaker, the same thing could be said by the private sector agent or agents who work within the private sector, if they are able to get their goods out of the Bridgetown Port in a timely and less costly manner, because they have to use the services of the Customs Department before they could have their goods released, to be able to get those goods out to the consumers, who would use these goods.

Mr. Speaker, another example could be that of an entrepreneur, who wants to register or who wants to incorporate his business within 24 to 36 hours because the speed at which that is registered, means the speed at which he could get his business done, that he could have a good presence and money could be made within the public or private space, in which that business is set up.

11.50 a.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Mr. R.D. JONES: Sir, it is an undeniable fact that technology can help with that kind of business. This has been proven, is absolutely correct and, therefore, the Democratic Labour Party will not deny that. Where it can do those things, let it be done; put the applications, technologies, hardware, software and various systems in place to facilitate it but do not ever fool ourselves that is all it would take.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the goal of greater transparency in Government which is the third part of the goal as set out in the strategy of the Government, it says through broadening public participation of the Governmental process. Mr. Speaker, I am just asking a question. How is this possible for this to occur? Sir, I am learning and I am sure that Honourable Members on the other side would seek to provide the clarification. How is this possible for this to occur when already in the hierarchy of Government there is some concern about the presence of what some people call blobs within the worldwide web; a web so conceptualised that people are free to express themselves without the overt interference of Government.

Mr. Speaker, we know that Governments interfere, that they go behind the back door and look at the behaviour and work of citizens. Sir, we know that it is also done in Barbados. I am not advocating that Government should not

keep an eye on such notions of sedition, or on criminal behaviour, or other conspiracies against the individual or State, or that our young people who are impressionable should not be guarded against what is placed on the worldwide web. I would not be so silly as to approach the expression of such words or behaviour. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there is a plethora of trash and filth which can be found there and Government has a duty to affirm good governance by filtering that trash from reaching the population. Sir, this must be stated up front because sometimes, we have to protect people from themselves. This may place us in a strange position as small gods but, Sir, it is part of the notion of governance.

Mr. Speaker, when citizens do not have access to non-critical information which does not affect the physical or economic security the State, how can they participate in the notion of transparency, accountability and such notions of good governance, when they cannot, even now, have access to non-critical information because of the culture of the sector of the State.

Mr. Speaker, this is a society in which simple request for non-critical information cannot be obtained and, Sir, it is frustrating for researchers and for persons who just want a little knowledge so that they could be better participants in Government and in the systems and good processes of governance.

Mr. Speaker, what is so difficult in obtaining information about our health or education systems? I am not talking about sensitive information that is going to corral the State. Why is it almost impossible to know who has been awarded a contract for the provision of a given service or good? It is about transparency and once it is done in a transparent, open, fair and equitable manner, the entire society of Barbados can know about but, Sir, these things are hidden and obfuscated under the table. Mr. Speaker, technology will not change these things because it is a policy orchestrated within the higher echelons of those who manage.

Mr. Speaker, I am not imputing any improper motives but it is almost like a system of the culture in which we are imbedded so that citizens are kept in the dark as to the beneficiaries of Government's largesse and Government's contracts, actions and activities and so they gossip. Mr. Speaker, when you gossip, so many things can be taken out of context but I cannot blame citizens who do this. They do this because of the lack of information and the lack of knowledge within the society.

Mr. Speaker, do not let us fool people that this notion of the Government will make a difference to that. What will assist the process is the promulgation of a freedom of information Act, the putting in place Barbados of a freedom of information Act. It is not beyond the ability

of our drafters of legislation to do that so that ordinary citizens can access relevant information and the disseminators of information such as journalists would be able to accurately report and respond on behalf of the people, particularly those who are disadvantaged, those who do not know how to access and find that information where it is embedded. Sir, in the absence of such, the status quo would remain. Therefore, information which allows for greater accountability and transparency and thus the emergence of good governance would remain clouded. There must be political will and not the mere assemblage of technological tools to achieve that objective.

Mr. Speaker, some laws passed in this Chamber in recent times do not give us much hope that there is fact the will - I am not reflecting on any discussion or debate which has taken place, I am just pointing to what has taken place. There seems to be the fear that if citizens know too much about decisions taken that they might not be too favourable in their responses to those who lead and manage the society. It is said that too much information might be a great burden but, Sir, too little information can create greater difficulty, greater problems, greater disruption and greater bad behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, I go further and say that an inefficient and ineffective system cannot be made efficient and effective by technology itself. We first have to address people issues and human resource issues as I have said before. When you are satisfied that there has been improvement or change then you can supplement or complement that work ethic by placing the technology beside those people and therefore, it becomes a more symbiotic interface with the technology because in fact, people have changed.

There are too many problems confronting the Barbadian worker in the public service which need to be addressed. These cannot be seriously addressed unless there is the political will. Sir, I use the word addressed but these issues might need to be undressed and pulled down so that persons may become more amenable to change.

Mr. Speaker, Government cannot change low morale, poor remuneration, inadequate working conditions, supersession, lack of promotion, victimisation, bad attitudes, poor work ethics, political interference or any such things. Sir, technology cannot do that.

H107/12:00

Sequence 12

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Mr. R.D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, what we have to do is to attack all those things simultaneously if we are to go

forward with such processes as e-governance or E-Government. Sir, I recognise that it cannot be done in an instance, but a demonstrated start would say to workers that there is sufficient interest in our welfare on conditions of service by those who look after the welfare of the worker.

Sir, if one looks at the efforts towards civil service reform, one does not get the impression that workers in the public service feel part of that process of change. It appears to be mechanistic, mostly an applied impressionistic notion that things are happening in a very transparent and effective manner; impressionistic. Mr. Speaker, as you are well-aware, there is a notion called Impressionistic Management. It is the facade, smoke and mirrors mentality or technique which is used. Therefore, persons are taught to be deluded that it is happening.

Sir, since one would expect that as the model employer - persons see the Government as the model employer - that Government would have the least disruption in the provision of service, but available evidence does not support this contention. Sir, there are strikes, I do not have to read them out; sickouts, I do not have to talk about them; absenteeism, I do not have to speak about it.

I heard the Honourable Member for St. Thomas speak to some of these issues, so I do not have to repeat her words, there were well-said. There are still very much part of the process of governance within this society and it goes back to many of the issues and concerns which I pointed to, absenteeism, victimisation, supersession, some of these attitudes.

Mr. Speaker, a Democratic Labour Party Government, as we look to the future with hope, would seriously look at equipping a public service with the attitudes and behaviour to do an effective and efficient job, in other words, to serve the best interest of the public. As part of that exercise, there would be a Civil Service code; a careful look at the operations of the system to see how it affects people, which would have the input of the Social Partners, a concept and design organised by the Democratic Labour Party in the early 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, more particularly, those on whom such a code would impact, they must be involved. We have to embrace our public service.

Mr. SPEAKER: Please, please, please.

Mr. R.D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, when we use the term embrace, one can almost feel the love and warmth which come as a result of that. So we are talking about an all-embracing, all-fulfilling concept of our public service in a more genuine and dynamic manner, if we want to be true partners in national development, that is what we must do. I

am sure that some Honourable Members on the other side might recognise exactly what I am talking about. They might not recognise it within the concept of embracing the public service, but they are familiar with embracing.

Sir, the Democratic Labour Party would engender raised morale. We are talking about substantial and serious reform. That is what we are talking about. Let us not be divided, if we want to achieve the best developmental focus for Barbados, over the placing of these ideas or concepts on the Floor. Ideas are, in reality, not original. They might very well be recycled, but there are a lot of persons who cannot even work on an original idea or a recycled idea. It is not at the point of the conceptualisation of the idea, but it is at the point of delivery, the implementation of the idea that I am talking about. Ideas are universal, so let us not debate that. It is a non-point. It is the implementation. Sir, when one gets to that point it is when substantial failure occurs.

Mr. Speaker, we will in general raise morale within the service by providing a regime of best practices. We are not only going to talk about. It will be done, a clear line of promotion, a recognition of both the value of experience and appropriate qualification as a necessary regime for promotion. You are not going to pit one against the other, but see a synergy in that pool of experience built up over time, which because of some reason might not be the 'hot shotter' now. Therefore, creating problems within the heart of other persons within the Civil Service, because someone is young and well qualified - I am glad for that.

Mr. Speaker, as a former teacher I always want to see our young people and our people getting more and better qualified to carry forward the work of Barbados. In fact, if a successful strategy is to emerge, there have to be talented faces working assiduously, to ensure that this project goes ahead without the kinds of hindrances and difficulties that some other projects have encountered. Sir, I am not quarreling about that.

There are going to be new actors on the stage putting forward such an agenda, persons with qualifications, that were not conceptualised at the time of the birth of the Honourable Member for St. Michael West. There were not conceptualised then, but they emerged as a dynamic process of human behaviour. Therefore, we should not necessarily toss them out, as though we are tossing out the baby with the bath water. It cannot be done.

The physical environment in which the public servants work would be drastically improved. Sir, persons would be exposed to training and an award scheme within the entire service, to ensure that the partnership with the Executive arm of Government would generate the result the country needs.

Mr. Speaker, in this 21st century, I am sure that you understand what I am talking about. The enthusiasm with which I, like the Minister who just spoke, understand and demand almost a changed process, a changed management and a changed leadership of what we want to be more dynamic.

We want to ensure that when we put training out there, we would not be skimping. We will not be holding back on the training of our people, because we recognise that without them, the country is nothing. I am not saying that the Government does but I am saying that our vision on this matter is clear. It is an unrepentant vision. Let us not cancel good programmes that are going to lift people up from the potato position that they are in.

Sir, as part of that process, we also have to encourage our young men, who are part of the Civil Service, who drive their wives and girlfriends to our various higher institutions of learning, go home, play dominoes or do something else and then go back and collect them. They should sit and learn beside them, because the society will demand both of them in partnership for national development. Therefore, we are saying that is what we will do.

Sir, we have to seriously ask if at this juncture, the engagement of Parliament in this debate is a priority for our development at this time, if it is priority number one. Too many issues are screaming for remediation, the increased earning of foreign exchange to support our life styles and standard of living must be a priority. The reduction of the national debt of Barbados must be a priority. Re-energising manufacturing and agriculture must be a priority. In other words, there are competing priorities within the national space. Therefore, how do we prioritise them or do we need to prioritise them, or should we just line them up within a parallel framework and work on each one at the same time, which might be impossible, based on the capacity of the State to produce.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many confronting our society and economy which would have a greater priority weighting than our interest in the notion of E-Government.

12.10 p.m.

Sequence 13

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

House 107, Sequence 14, 12.10 p.m.

Continuation of: Mr. R.D. JONES:

Sir, this is what is before us and this is what is before the Democratic Labour Party and we would therefore not

renege on our responsibility in this Parliament or in the wider society of examining these issues and sharing ideas with the public.

I know that the Honourable Member for Christ Church South is listening with rapt attention. I am fully appreciative of that mental commitment, Mr. Speaker, from the Honourable Member for Christ Church South. He is learning. We therefore discussed this Draft E-Government Strategy before us, in the light of that pronouncement. We examined it in the light of the experiences, which we have noted, as Government has sought to implement some aspect of this E-Government programme across the public sector.

The Honourable Member for St. James North, who led off the debate, spoke about some of these different perspectives we must necessarily take because we have different experiences. One sees the presence of this in the Smartstream financial package - I love the name, Smartstream because it is smart and it is a stream, both in the same time -, the ASYCUDA Plus Plus Three System in the Customs Department, the STRIDE System at the National Insurance Department and the EduTech Programme, just to name a few. There are many others that are well identified, within the Draft E-Government Strategy.

Mr. Speaker, all of these technology-based networks have been laced with problems. I am only using these as examples of where we should not go. We should learn from the past experiences. This is the only point that I am making. I am not here gloating that there would have been difficulties. This is not my way. Mr. Speaker, let me just give an example and hope that as we apply the strategy, as we look at using technology more and more across our space, that we should avoid some of the pitfalls which came up.

We could well remember, Mr. Speaker, and the Honourable Member for St. James North spoke about it, the difficulties and problems experienced by citizens of Barbados who use the service of the National Insurance Department, when as was reported, the much vaunted STRIDES Technology Programme failed. I was not there. Mr. Speaker, I have not gone to the National Insurance Department in about 15 years, not because I was not employed but the contributions were taken out and sent there so I did not have to deliver them.

Mr. Speaker, you could well remember the anguish and the statements of promise by the Honourable Minister as to when this matter would be resolved, when there was going to be an easement on the burdens, the difficulties and the plight of those who had to access the services. Thankfully, Mr. Speaker, that is over.

Asides.

Mr. R.D. JONES: I said thankfully. I do not know, but I always hope and pray for the best because services such as this impact on the citizens, particularly the most vulnerable citizens. Sir, persons go to the National Insurance Scheme because of vulnerability, were exposed. Sir, it might be Unemployment Benefit. It might be Old Aged Pension, contributory or non-contributory. Therefore, when the system fails, people are damaged. People suffer and they have to resolve to techniques now that the proud Barbadians do not like to resort to; that is, can you lend me. Barbadians do not like that phrase, but when systems fail as it did at the National Insurance Department that is what happened.

The ASYCUDA Plus Plus Three System, still very much a dos-base system, not the most easily managed, and it is still fraught with difficulties. Sir, one saw the effort, which has to be applauded, but one has to work to ensure that not only the applause is given for effort, but that success emerges at the end of the day, because of the careful and studied application by those people who are concerned with such technology.

Sir, the system was supposed to streamline the various Customs procedures, but when you talk to custom brokers, and persons who import goods into Barbados, there are endless complaints about the frustration, which they experience on a daily basis.

Asides.

Mr. R.D. JONES: I do not use the services of the Custom Department, but I use it indirectly, as a client of a provider of goods, so it will affect me. If it does not come out in a timely manner, there is an effect on cost, so that would affect me. Sir, persons in the public service complain that they did not receive their pay and the blame is put on Smartstream. Blame the technology, Sir, seems to be the mantra; blame Smartstream, they did not process it.

Mr. Speaker, technology only processes that which is input therein. Let us debunk these notions of creating a mystique. There is no mystique. There is sophistication, yes, in the making of the technology but it is a simple process to use, always. We simplified it. All of these things are only tools. If the persons who operate them are not able to utilise appropriately, you would get frustration and technology being blamed essentially for what are the mistakes of people.

This is nothing new that I am saying, the mistakes of people, starting from the conceptualisation of the projects, through deployment, implementation and utilisation of the particular technology. Therefore, do not let us believe that efficiency and effectiveness would find their panacea in the

deployment of the technology, in this instance, the E-Government Strategy.

The EduTech Programme, as part of this technological effort, needs its own special mention, and I have spoken to this matter before. I want to reiterate, because I know some Honourable Member on the Other Side would get up and say that the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central was part of the process. This is true. It is a process, Mr. Speaker, that I still embrace. I understand the value and the utility of technology in education, Government or whatever. We cannot run and we cannot hide from the technological advance across the world. It is real. It is dynamic. It is impacting our lives.

Mr. Speaker, mere cell phone, the two or three that are possessed by Honourable Members from the Other Side, simply demonstrates that, but this technological effort can be said to have failed. I cry, Sir, because in reality it was not set up to fail. Right now, the technology is obsolete and the Honourable Member spoke to the notion of obsolescence. Maybe, there are some things that we did not do, and I use the word, we. Deployment in some instances was erratic, especially as one moved into the Phase 2 schools. Some schools now cannibalise some computers to make others work. I am just talking about the aspect of the Educational Sector Enhancement Programme that deals simply with hardware and software within the school environment, and nothing else.

Sir, there have been some things that worked and continue to work. I note that and I speak the truth. Therefore, I do not want to stand as a heretic and say nothing has not worked. I will not do that. I will not tarnish my soul with such behaviour. Some schools are still to receive their pieces of technology.

Therefore, the Honourable Minister has to give answers, not the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central, the Honourable Member for St. Philip North, the Honourable Member for St. John, nor the Honourable Member for St. Philip West. We are not the ones to give answers.

House 107, Sequence 14, 12:20:14

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Mr. R. D. JONES: It is the Honourable Minister who has to give these answers, and I am asking for some this day, because we are talking about technology, E-Governance Strategy, the implementation and the utilisation of technology across the land space of Barbados. These valiant efforts are being applauded, so the Honourable Minister should give the answers.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister should tell us about the cost to date. That is what the transparency of a third goal is talking about. Sir, I know that the Honourable Member will do that because he has these things at his fingertips. What is the cost? What is the cost of setting all of them up where they cannot be used today?

Mr. Speaker, I do not go into our schools unless I am invited, I will not do that to the principals and teachers. I have been told that not one Study Pro at some of the schools is functioning because of processes of networking issues. Sir, the Honourable Member is familiar with the phrase or term Study Pro, which is a special type of mobile computer. Sir, that is money gone down the drain.

Mr. Speaker, I want the Honourable Minister to speak to these things. I am not a Luddite by any stretch of the imagination. I recognise the immense benefits of technology and education and Government services. Mr. Speaker, we have to weigh that cost with the other competing needs of the society. There must be a phased implementation of the project such as this in light of its utility value.

Mr. Speaker, I would have also in this context to be a bit critical of the private sector because I do not believe that they are moving fast enough with the whole notion of e-commerce and with the whole notion of facilitating the economic development of Barbados by having viable merchant bank facilities and by having payments done online right across the length and breadth of Barbados. All of that is part of the wider strategy that is to be employed. Mr. Speaker, one has to appeal to that. One has to appeal to the partnership among all the various social actors, the various economic actors and the political actors as we work in this kind of context.

Mr. Speaker, my statement was not only a warning, it was also about the inevitabilities of certain realities. It is not a denial of the reality. We need a digital signature law as part of this process. Sir, you could go and do a letter online, but unless you do something else... One has to recognise that there is a need for digital signature law in Barbados as happening in other spaces and maybe this will emerge. Mr. Speaker, one has to look at the issue of security and privacy. Sir, not too long ago in the United States of America the identities of many were lost because one did not properly, adequately and correctly safeguard the personal and private information of the ordinary citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are some Honourable Members who would not care if their identities disappear because they might emerge as somebody else. Not mine, Mr. Speaker, I love mine.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be careful. Are we going to put all of this information on the internet so that persons who have the knowledge to assess it, can assess it? There is a lot of hue and cry. Let us learn, Mr. Speaker, from the mistakes of others so that as we apply, we would not be making those kinds of mistakes.

Mr. Speaker, that is the whole issue of security and privacy. Some notion of this was mentioned within the E-Government Strategy. We have to look at the limited resources that the State possesses in relation to how we apply. Sir, the application or the applying of information and communication technologies is costly. Sir, those who are the providers of it keep the cost at a high level because of their need to maintain a high level of profit on the particular product.

Mr. Speaker, we have to look at the culture of the organisation, which I spoke about, so I would not repeat it. As we move towards such notions as e-government, we have to look at how we could coordinate across ministries and within departments across ministries. Are we going to have the similar type of system, the same kind of software, the same type of server applications right across the board which might be easier management? Are we going to have these things being similar right across the board so that there is a seamless interface, or are we going to be confounded by what you called historical or legacy systems impacting and interfacing on more modern and contemporary systems which will provide compatibility issues, which can be worked out, but which one must note, would be present. All of this is part of the exercise in this.

Mr. Speaker, one has to look at the resistance to change. Mr. Speaker, I would speak to that particular aspect before I take my seat. There is resistance to change in any organisation or in any structure. Civil servants, just like any human being, would resist change. There are some who feel that the presence of technology might displace them. Mr. Speaker, let me say up front that technology does not necessarily cause you to work softer or easier, it causes you to work smarter and better, so we must not be fooled that the presence of technology is somehow going to make you work easier, it will make you work smarter and better.

Mr. Speaker, if there is resistance to change, a lot of the efforts will go unherald and a lot of the efforts will go to naught. Mr. Speaker, the leadership has to come from what is called the wider national vision for Barbados. The Democratic Labour Party has a very wide national vision for Barbados, a small piece of which I spoke to. We will continue to enunciate these issues across Barbados. We will not dissuade ourselves that the utilisation of technology is useful within the processes and the systems of Government going online, that there are processes which can be done.

Mr. Speaker, there are some Government authorities which can be paid via your bank account. The Barbados Water Authority has a brilliant system online. We need to support that. One could sit at one's computer and pay one's bill, one does not have to spend an extended amount of money on gas.

Mr. Speaker, let us be careful, let us be cautious and let us do those things first which are necessary. The principal point that I have been making throughout this exercise is to let us put people at the centre of whatever we do. Mr. Speaker, we must understand that the change which must come about can only come about in the change of the attitudes and the behaviours of the people. The Democratic Labour Party will continue to make its input on these issues, will continue to be vigilant and will continue to clamour for transparency, for accountability, for integrity and for the removal of corruption. These things will be supported if they are devoid of such instruments of abnormal behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: 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.

House 107 Sequence 15

12.30 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

RESUMPTION

MR. SPEAKER: This Sitting is resumed. The Honourable Member for St. James South.

Hon. K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that it is a real privilege to be part and parcel of this very important debate on E-Government Strategy in Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that it is perhaps the first such debate, which a Parliament, properly constituted in the Caribbean, is having on such a very critical issue. It basically will seek to pitchfork this country into the rest of our existence, both socially, politically, economically and culturally.

Sir, if we do not speak, and extensively so, to a future, in terms of the way in which we grapple, the way in which we manage and the way in which we interface with information technology, then we are a lost people.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest challenge today facing small vulnerable economies - and I 'kid' you not - is the fact that we are on the wrong side of the digital divide, that which makes the United States of America, that which makes the European Union, that which makes the so-called industrialised world's major powers, largely turn on the fact that they now manipulate information technology, in a way and to an extent that we cannot do. Therefore, if are to become a developed country and a developed economy, then the question of the way in which we confront and the way in which, in my view, we challenge and overcome the obstacles of technological illiteracy, is critical. Sir, I could put it no less simple, bluntly and straightforward than that.

Mr. Speaker, I would want to say that as I listened to the Honourable Member who responded for the Opposition, I could not have helped but to reflect on the fact that there is perhaps a major divide across this Honourable Chamber. Sir, it is a situation in which Barbados is now given a classic opportunity to make an assessment of those who are most fit and suitable, in this time, to manage the reins of Government, as opposed to those who still have some way to go, in order to come to a situation or to a stage at which they would be ready.

Mr. Speaker, at 12:15 p.m. precisely, the principal spokesperson for the Opposition made the point, or made what he considered to be a point, that there was no priority in this matter of e-government, and that there were other things, for example, balance of payment issues. The Honourable Member also pointed to the way in which Government provides its services which were, in his view, more critical than the critical issue of e-governance.

Mr. Speaker, I want to stress on that issue at this early stage of this speech because it helps us to set a context in which we have to operate, if we have to speak sensibly to it as a strategy. Mr. Speaker, Barbados today has to make itself more efficient. Government's services are critical. All of us in this country have to interface with the bureaucracy, if we are to live in Barbados. It might be as simple as obtaining a driver's licence. It might be as fundamental as paying VAT, or paying Inland Revenue Department.

Sir, the fact of the matter is that Government's services are critical and, therefore, there must be efficiency. Persons cannot draw a dividing line in terms of priority between raising revenue, on the one hand, and the effectiveness and efficiency created by an e-government regime, on the other, because both are part of the same coin.

It is also important to understand that if Barbados is to become an international centre... Mr. Speaker, let us not dream too largely, let us dream at a pace at which the Democratic Labour Party will continue to understand us. If Barbados is to see itself as a regional information technology centre, then Government has to connect to its citizens, through modern communication technology and create a framework for that technology and within which that technology has to operate. Mr. Speaker, that framework has to be one in which there has to be e-governance and equally e-commerce.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that part and parcel of the exercise of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy... Sir, it is perhaps unfortunate that we do not speak to these things more extensively in this place. In fact, a built-in agenda is to have an e-commerce protocol in this region, so that business people, citizens, consumers, all persons and all entities in CARICOM, would be able to seamlessly interface with each other, by way of e-commerce transactions. We are, therefore, speaking about using information technology, the internet, mastery of the computer, making it accessible to all, in a way that will advance our economic value as a society and as a group of countries.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, when we come to this Parliament to debate this issue, we are, in effect, speaking about cost reduction, in terms of the way in which Government does its business and in terms of the cost to the consumer because I, as a citizen, going to stand in line at the Licensing Authority and taking an hour to get out of that line, would have wasted time and time is money. Sir, that time has value. Sir, what we are saying is that Government must come to a point where it can issue or renew a driver's licence, in a way in which the citizen does not have to carve out 90 minutes of his day, to stand in a line.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about faster responses, so that when I pay my VAT, as a businessman and I want to get back the return from the Government, I would not find myself constrained for five or six months, but that I can rely on the information technology, enabling a faster and more efficient response. Sir, that is what I mean when I speak about economic value.

1.40 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. K.D. SYMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, if I am to draw a departure with the speaker who led off for the Opposition on this matter, it is simply that priority No. 1 must be efficiency in the services of the Government and it must go hand in hand with public capacity. Sir, the average Barbadian citizen has to be capable of interacting with and

manipulating information technology in such a way that he is not just adept but effectively, we want to create a skills bank of persons who are highly competent and highly savvy in the way in which they interface with information technology. Sir, why do we want to do that?

Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should begin by looking at the EduTech Programme. Sir, from the time you are going to school, we want to know that there are young people in Barbados across the primary school level and again, at secondary school level who are extremely competent and adept at what is changing technology because it becomes obsolete quickly. Sir, unless you invest heavily in that training while you are in the prime of life, then you are lost to it forever. This is why the EduTech Programme has been treated the way it has been by this Government. It is a part of a holistic approach that has to be engaged in. Equally, there are those who have already passed through the school system like yourself and I but if we are not in a position to master the technology, then we are no better off. Sir, it cannot be technology only for those at school because the information age is upon us. This is what distinguishes us from the rest of the so-called world, the fact that we are on the wrong side of a digital divide and our challenge is to create the answer to technological illiteracy.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, we go into the communities with the Community Technology Development Programme. There are inadequate resources out there and we have made sure that in community centres across Barbados... Sir, more has to be done because every constituency or parish does not have one but there several in some parishes. Mr. Speaker, the work is en train in fleshing out the capacity across this society to help persons who do not have the financial wherewithal to have a computer in their homes and to help those who do not have the benefit of someone to formally teach them the difficulties of the internet and information technology world. Sir, it will help persons who want to sit down in front of a computer screen and understand how to fill out forms and manipulate files.

Mr. Speaker, a mechanic can keep records of his customers, of what he has purchased and of what he has sold and be able to manipulate those records. Sir, there is a Community Resource Centre and there is a Community Technology Programme which places it at the fingertips of every man, woman and child in Barbados. Sir, that is the plan of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, the ultimate of e-government has to be not only the provision of Government services and the ability to access those services but critically, there has to be a capacity on the part of the individual because the citizen in Barbados is also the consumer and the consumer must be able to access the service. Mr. Speaker, this is as

fundamental in 2006 as free education was in 1966. Sir, it is a challenge to the level of literacy.

Mr. Speaker, universal availability in my view has to be the first priority. I part company completely with the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central when he questions it as a priority. I want to say to the Honourable Member that if we were to give this serious thought, that we would understand the dilemma which we face. If this is not done as a strategy, then whither Barbados. Sir, something as fundamental to us all as taxation can be in peril. I want to make the point that the nation state finds itself dependent for its survival on its capacity to raise revenue.

Mr. Speaker, let us argue for a one moment that you were an American and that you had a company which recruited me to do work in the British Virgin Island, that I did not have to go there physically to do the work, that I could sit on a computer and e-mail that work to your office in the British Virgin Island and that I entered into an arrangement that you pay me at the First Caribbean Bank in the Bahamas. Sir, the nation state called Barbados is none the wiser as the transaction which has taken place nor the Inland Revenue Department is none the wiser as to the transaction which has taken place.

Mr. Speaker, the danger we face is that if we do not respond seriously and sensibly right now without a moment to lose to this issue of having an E-Government Strategy, is that we will come to the situation where the lowest income branch in this country might be liable to taxation because they do not have access to the knowledge economy while the highest income branch in this country would be able to evade taxation because they have access to it.

Mr. Speaker, it raises a serious issue because it takes us above and beyond access to the internet, above and beyond the ability to manipulate the information technology, into the realm of strengthening the departments of Government. Sir, I want to speak to this issue at length in this House.

Mr. Speaker, as we propose the Bill as a Government, in my view, as a Government, we are duty-bound to recognise the difficulties which we will face in this society if the society is not able to respond in a strategic and serious way to this new era of business which we are introducing. I say to this House in all seriousness that fundamental departments like Inland Revenue must now be vested with greater investigatory powers and with greater reach, not so that Government becomes an encroaching big brother but because, as I have just outlined by way of one simple example, it is entirely possible for there to be transactions which take place to bring in large sums of income but remain outside the scrutiny of the revenue. Sir, the fact of the matter is that fundamental to

the duty of the State to fight the evasion of taxation is the State's ability to have knowledge of the transaction upon which the taxation is going to be based.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot join with a derelict and decrepit intellectual force in the Democratic Labour Party, to have us believe that this is not a priority because there is no greater priority. I also want to take the opportunity to caution...

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The Honourable Member should not use such language in this debate. Surely, it is not parliamentary language which the Honourable Member is using. Sir, I am asking you to rule on that particular matter.

Hon. K.D. SYMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw derelict and decrepit. I do not wish this to become a partisan/political issue and I withdraw both words. Mr. Speaker, I think we have a duty to confront this issue seriously. I want to take the opportunity in the minutes allowed to me to structure this contribution along the lines of whither we go from here. We are at the stage where we are introducing a strategy which, in my view, is absolutely fundamental.

H107/13:50

Sequence 17

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Hon. K.D. SYMMONDS: There is also a duty for a Government to caution Barbados that there are certain cultural aspects of our way of life, which also have to be changed if this fundamental thing that we are introducing is to be useful.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, there is a practice now in Government departments where there is already technological capacity in existence, for there to be isolated applications for specific Government departments or institutions, so you have an isolated and fragmented framework where the Barbados Water Authority and the Inland Revenue Department are doing their own thing, et cetera.

Sir, what we need to come with, is a solution where there is a single face of Government and a holistic understanding across the board, irrespective of whether it is a statutory corporation or central Government. What you are dealing with is a citizen, who is a consumer of services, a customer who needs to be able to benefit from a knowledge, that the way in which he is treated, will go beyond that which is traditional. Mr. Speaker, there is a tradition about Government's citizen interaction which worries me. I am going to tell you why.

Sir, the first concern I have is with respect to security and the need for security. It would be a loss exercise to discuss E-Government Strategy, if we do not contact the issue of security. Nothing has threatened the industrialised world more in recent times, than the threat of identity theft. Sir, in good faith you go to an automated teller machine, there will be a high risk, if the necessary authentication is not there, the necessary protection is not there of your identity, that someone else will assume the identity of His Honour, Mr. Ishmael Roett, and use that for any purpose that he or she sees fit.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy continues to demonstrate his unsuitability. This is not an issue of whether there is somebody in the Honourable House by the name of Ishmael Roett, above and beyond you, Sir. This is an issue of whether there is somebody out there, who can seize the name and manipulate it to suit his own narrow interest, which may be fundamentally at variance with your interest.

Sir, I wish to caution this Honourable House. We are on the precipice and the cusp of a new way of life. The sheer volume of information that Government departments can get from citizens, makes it fundamental that Government treats to this matter as one in which the fundamental rights, the most vital rights, of citizens are protected. That brings us to the question of privacy.

Sir, how do we protect that issue? How do we defend the citizen in the situation where he or she is going about their business. Sir, there is a matter of electronic payment taking place, you have to receive an electronic receipt of the payment, you are also dealing with a large number of applications from a vast number of citizens, and then the question of management of that information, the question of ensuring that there is a proper audit of the way that information is treated, these are situations which require, in my view, robust, not only good faith but prudential measures.

Mr. Speaker, I can give this Honourable House a few examples, where we have to tighten up the way in which we do business in Barbados. For example, we have a number of record keeping agencies in this country. Criminal records vary in nature, they have context. If I commit a certain type of crime, that crime must be recorded in perpetuity. I cannot rape someone and that can just be expunged from a record. On the other hand, a traffic misdemeanour is something that can be expunged from a record. After a period of time it can go away. We have to make sure that he or she who is charged with preserving those records electronically, because you are now moving a paperless society... There is no way of going into the Registry and digging up the files to see if it is there or not. It has to be there. There has to be certainty. The

fundamental right of the citizen and his or her access to a way of life after has to be properly safeguarded.

Sir, I also make the point that we recently passed a piece of legislation which will create new forensic powers in Barbados. It is a fundamentally useful piece of legislation. What would we do if investigations are taking place of a forensic nature, and you may recall that some of those investigations can be of an intimate nature. For example, I can obtain swabs from someone who is a suspect, and those swabs can be intimate swabs, intimate in the sense of the body cavities. Sir, if those records are not necessary for the continuation of a criminal case or some other type of case, then those records should be allowed either to be expunged or handed over. What happens if, we do not have a system in place which so protects and preserves the rights of individuals?

Mr. Speaker, perhaps, I should speak to this Honourable House in the context of what the law has been elsewhere. We are not the first country to go down this road. Places before us in the industrialised world have been there. We would do well to recognise that in Great Britain, vast amounts of money have been paid by the Crown in damages to the citizen, whose rights have been violated in these types of situations. The lesson that we must learn, even now, as are in the initial stages, is to understand that there has to be a system built in that properly protects and preserves the rights of individuals, while at the same time we minimise the degree of access and the number of persons who have access to some of those private types of information.

Sir, it cannot be a situation where Mr. X is a clerk, and he is off today - as we do things in Barbados - he has gone on leave for four or five weeks, so Miss Y comes in to deputise for him and she has full access, then her maternity leave comes along and Mr. P comes around and he too has full access to the information, that is not the way in which it can work.

Sir, I am making the point that there are operators

of this type of technology who, in other places, have abused information. As we advance towards an e-governance society, we must be very mindful of the fact that we must build in the necessary safeguards to protect the Barbadian citizen. Mr. Speaker, I will not be supportive of anything that falls short of the protections of the rights of the Barbadian citizen in this type of situation.

I also want to call at this stage for this country to come face-to-face with the need for higher standards. I believe that the threat from a hacker on a computer, is something that we can fight against. You never do it perfectly because that is the nature of the information technology, but you can build in safeguards to fight against

hackers. I am not sure, however, if you could build in a safeguard to fight against a disgruntled worker or a careless worker. There has to be a certain level of commitment on the part of the public servants of Barbados, to come on board in this exercise so that accountability standards can be maintained and preserved.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that there are already areas in Barbados, where we have gone the digital route and we have to pause and ask ourselves is this working. I mean no ill will. Sir, let us say, for argument, the National Housing Corporation, now alleges that it can track an application online. Many people, in good faith, have applied for land or access to land and house and they believe that their application number, ABC, 123, is being tracked online, but when they go online, much to their surprise, that is not always the case. You cannot always track it. That certainly has been the experience that I had in my constituency office when persons came calling on that matter. I also gather from other members that has been their concern as well.

Sir, that brings us to the issue of standards. That brings us to the issue of being able to access your personal records. Sir, once you are in an E-Government system, it also requires you to be able to have access, because the whole world is paperless. If you say that there is a record and the record is in the system, then tell me how I can find my record. That has been the lesson learnt in the United States of America, that has been the lesson learnt in Canada, that has been the lesson learnt in the United Kingdom; jurisdictions which, I must apologise, but I must also say we look towards as forms of precedent.

14.00 p.m.

Sequence 18

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

House 107, Sequence 19, 4.00 p.m.

Continuation of: Hon. K.D. SYMMONDS:

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that if there are personal files about me, and they are held in cyberspace, then I do not want to hear that they are in cyberspace and I cannot find out about my personal file. Show me, let me be able to follow that which you are saying because it is there for me to manipulate, as much as it is there for you, and it changes the entire culture of secrecy in which the civil service has operated.

Mr. Speaker, that is one aspect but there is another aspect, which we have to look at and it is the question of the power relations in this society. Technology now will make it possible for there to be electronic Government

services access, but in a manner which would facilitate speech to text for persons who are visually and hearing impaired, or text to speech. Mr. Speaker, if you are going to introduce this kind of strategy, the strategy has to be one in which persons who were otherwise compromised because of a disability, would no longer be compromised because the technology is such that you can move from text to speech or speech to text, depending.

It does not fall within my concept of how this thing could operate for Government in an age where you have that kind of technology, not to be using it and providing it to its citizens, so that we fundamentally change the power relations in Barbados, Sir, so that those persons who are differently able would be equally able to access this fundamental service.

Mr. Speaker, you have indicated to me that I only have two minutes. I do not know how much more I have left because there are other things that I would want to say by way of caution. If I have no more time, Sir, I would be guided and I would pause at this stage.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you have one more minute.

Hon. K.D. SYMMONDS: In that one minute, Sir, let me just speak more generally. As I indicated, I think that our real challenge today is to sensibly make contact with the way in which we, as a country, overcome the digital divide. This Parliament would do itself an injustice in my view, if it does not recognise that in the Caribbean, we are playing a leading role in bringing Government to the people, in this form.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot go to St. Lucia, St. Vincent or Dominica and find this type of thing happening. I do not say that as a matter of boasting. I say that as a matter of caution because we now, Sir, become the precedent. We now become that which people will look to, to see whether something as important as E-Government, can work or cannot work.

Mr. Speaker, as we go forward, I only want us to go forward in the certain knowledge that it is not a perfect system. It is not the answer to all things to all people, but there are mistakes which have been made by other people and we would do well, Sir, to learn from those mistakes and avoid duplication thereof.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for your indulgence.

Mr. T.A. PRESCOD: Mr. Speaker, the onus is on me to speak on this specific issue, since the Ministry of Social Transformation has, within its ambit, a progressive national programme that works concomitantly with the programme

within the Ministry of Education, namely, the EduTech Programme.

It also works in harmony with this effort of Public Sector Reform that relates to E-Government. Therefore, it is imperative that I give some clarity to the role in which the Ministry that I represent is relevant to this specific debate.

First of all, I listened to those who spoke with some level of credit before me, and I also listened to those who spoke with some level of bewilderment and confusion on this specific subject matter. Those speaking for a considerable time, the nature of the entanglement left me unclear on where they stood on this specific issue.

The impression was given, according to what I deduced from the Opposition that the Government's role was narrowed down to simply a facilitator of the programme, and that we had no other role to play in the circumstances.

If the Government does not possess men and women of wisdom, and does not understand the relevance of the changes in the world order, and understand that there are fundamental and radical changes occurring in a post industrial world, then the Government would be left far behind in planning the appropriate programmes that would help this society to remain modern and relevant to what is happening around it.

You have to give credit to a Government in a small economy, which is not in the forefront of the changes of the world global order but reacting to the circumstances as a consequence of the dynamics in the order, and making sure that we put the required provisions in place, so that we can be very relevant to time.

Sir, fifty years ago, this would not have been an issue. These are realities. There are times when the world order changes and societies all over the world rustle with complex, academic and administrative positions of how to respond to changes.

A man who lived in the feudal age would not be dealing with information technology, he probably would look for a hoe and a fork. That was the level of technology then, which to you is an obsolete tool today.

People during the days of capitalism; raw, vulgar capitalism, this element of technology that now forces these societies to respond, would not be an issue of the time. Even so, in those days, when the society was more structured on oligarchic methods of controlling things, the consideration of spreading capabilities and ability, equitably among all the different social classes and races in the society, would not have been a consideration.

Therefore, you would probably just make sure that the level of education for the time was relevant to the specific, elitists educational core in the society, because you knew what type of society you wanted for your time. We understand today what type of society we want for our time. Therefore, education reflects values. It reflects norms. It tells you how a politician on this side or the next side thinks about people and about society.

If they want only a special core of the society to be fully educated, according to the relevance of time, then you would not spread education at the wide national or universal level. You would keep the educational level within certain limited areas, so that there would only be a few persons in this society, who understand the society around them and understand things that happen around the world.

Sir, education is about power. People do not allow education to be widely spread - especially if they have power - that easily. Education among us did not spread because the people who had the economic power in their hands wanted us to be knowledgeable on things. We have a different kind of approach to governance and we recognise that information technology and communication are important elements of the modern world. We believe that those social barriers of monopoly, in the educational system by the elitist core in the system, should not remain.

Sir, what you are witnessing is a mirror of this Government and how it feels about the society itself. Should we only make information technology available to those at the level of tertiary education? Should we only allow those who had an opportunity at the highest secondary level, to enjoy access to information technology?

House 107, Sequence 19, 14:10:14

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. T. A. PRESCOD: Mr. Speaker, no. We spread it at the secondary level as a consequence of the EduTech Programme, we spread it at the primary level and we also reach out to a class of persons in the post-secondary environment who probably would have missed the opportunity of the time, to now take advantage of another element of the programme making it not just segmented or piecemeal but a holistic and complete consummate approach involving every element of human nature in the society giving everybody, from age seven to 107, access to the information age. That is the whole concept behind all of this.

Mr. Speaker, this programme is very relevant. I do not know how someone can attempt to speak so long and so loudly on this subject matter, pontificating to be a man knowledgeable in the area of matters relating to learning

and education, but can only see Government's role in the circumstances as a facilitator.

Mr. Speaker, Government must have the vision to understand what is likely to occur in the future if we do not move swiftly to make sure we respond to the changes in technology. Government must understand the importance and the advantages of having a central database unit in the Civil Service today.

Mr. Speaker, let us take, for example, the Ministry of Social Transformation, which has so many different departments dealing with poverty. If we had a central database unit we would be able to make a better analysis based on the data in the various units of the department, the Child Care Board and the Welfare Department. Mr. Speaker, if you check each unit, you would see that in some way they deal with poverty in the broad sense, because they deal with social deprivation. Sir, they deal with poverty not just in the bread and basket sense of the interpretation, they deal with poverty which is equivalent to social deprivation.

Sir, we have the Welfare Department that deals with people living in poverty. We have the Child Care Board. Some children are socially disadvantaged. We have the Disabilities Unit. We have a whole set of agencies that accumulate their own independent data and sometimes on the same individual.

Sir, you have to duplicate and overlap the responsibilities of the various departments because there is no central unit within the Ministry that would enable us to have access to the information coming from one unit feeding back into a central unit and having all the information available to us so that we can make an analysis of that family or that individual in the society.

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand how any modern thinker, who has a responsibility to understand people's concerns, cannot understand that an effort to rationalise the entire programme by giving access to all different social divisions of the society and by adding to it, e-governance, CommunityTech and EduTech, is important to a nation in terms of strengthening the nation's human capital in order to make the nation more efficient and to give an opportunity to people to be able to monitor situations all around them.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes when you have information segmented in the way in which it is segmented at present - and this society is growing, and you discover things every day that were not available to you last year, yesterday or even a minute ago - is what keeps man being interested in what is happening and trying to find new solutions. The world is not static. You are seeing the changes now of a

real radical transformation of the society as a consequence of information technology and communication.

Mr. Speaker, if one goes to an airport in Europe, goes in a long line and is ignorant to the technology, one has to spend three hours in the line. Sir, one dare not go to that machine. That machine is like a monster. Sir, should we cultivate a society that has a plethora of ignorance in it? It is simply that. This debate is about whether or not you want to cultivate a society that has a plethora of ignorance in it or whether or not you want it develop and cultivate a society that produces men and women of wisdom.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from St. James Central said, it speaks about a philosophical divide because if you are a victim of that body that produced the plethora of ignorance, then you would come to the conclusion that having a programme that is spread universally in a society like this is of no use to the society, it is nothing to do with relevance, and you are going to reduce it down to the most simplistic denominator by making it appeared that all Government is doing is facilitating: Would you not facilitate in the circumstances? I have to ask that question. They would not facilitate information technology in the governance of the State. That is the question that has to be answered.

Mr. Speaker, it is alright to get on the other side and talk loosely, but when it is subjected to deep thought and you ask the persons who say these things, would you not facilitate Barbados and Barbadian people in developing communication and information technology models in order to relate to what is happening all around them in Barbados and outside of Barbados...

Sir, can you imagine a Government being so backward to refuse to accept that these are universal changes that are going on around them. Sir, sometimes when you listen to the Opposition speaking on these issues, you ask yourself where would we be today, if the men who speak as the voices of an enlightened Democratic Labour Party had the opportunity to run this country as Attorney-General. Sir, you have to ask where is the capacity of the individuals to do so. Sir, you have to ask where is the alternative minister. Sir, if tomorrow morning, out of some unfortunate level in the electoral process, they had to select somebody from over there to run the Ministry of Education, where would this country go.

Sir, I would like to ask the businessmen in this country where would they be if Government did not provide opportunities for them. I would also like to ask the 'boys on the block' where will they be today in a modern world if this Government did not extend the opportunity to them just like all other young people across this country who went to secondary school and had the opportunity to go to the University of the West Indies. Mr. Speaker, they

would not even know how to press the remote control to turn on their television. Sir, you must make the adaptation.

Mr. Speaker, as long as I am Minister of Social Transformation, I am not going to deny the people of St. Lucy. I give this assurance to the Honourable Member for St. Lucy. Mr. Speaker, I am going to make sure that I make the Information Technology Programme available to every little boy and girl from within the parameters of St. Lucy as a parish and as a constituency. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy would be able to bring children from age seven to 107 to that programme.

Mr. Speaker, the society is not ignorant. The response of the community is a reflection of the demand for the services. I have data in my possession which came from the computer of the various pockets across Barbados and I have a register of persons who would like to have access to the programme some of whom are not even waiting until the programme is fully expanded in the Civil Service.

House 107 Sequence 20

2.20 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. T. A. PRESCOD: They are taking advantage of the availability of the Community Technology Programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you would come to one of the evening classes being organised by any of the Community Resource Centres, you would see firemen, clerical staff of the Civil Service, maids, people from the Sanitation Service Authority and staff of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation. Sir, you would see people from all different institutions, both private and public, taking advantage of the service. Therefore, why would Honourable Members say that it is not relevant or that it is not a necessity for Government to even think in terms of broadening the geographical spread of computers? Why would Honourable Members see it as a waste of public funds?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this is so, then it would mean that education would have failed us and that these people, who are now demanding access to such technology, would have to be placed in the category of being ignorant. Do you want to convince me, from a partisan perspective, that all of these people, who want to take these classes, are not people of wisdom? Is that a perception that some Honourable Members have of the people who want to go to evening classes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, any assessment of it, from any category, would show that these people want to go on the classes, would mean that it is relevant and that there is a

demand for it. Sir, students take the modules, which are available to them, they have developed the things that they could not have done before and the things that they never had confidence or never felt they had the capability to do, have now become possible after these courses. Therefore, it gives a sense of assurance and builds the self-esteem of persons. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that has not prevented anyone from reading a book.

Sir, another thing is that because a young man might have access to the computer, it does not stop him from going to the dictionary or to a thesaurus, to know a little more about what a word means. The computer at least provides information for you on the internet but you have access to a wide set of academic and informative material, to which you normally would not have access. There are people at present in Barbados, who are owners of computers but who have only two books in their houses. These books are the Bible and a bank book.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the past, there were many houses in Barbados, where one would have found only a Bible and a bank book; persons were afraid to use a dictionary. In the past, someone could have hidden \$5 000 in a dictionary and even a criminal would not have gone near that dictionary. Sir, today you can access all of that information you need, by going on the internet system. Therefore, it is not only a matter of the efficiency of government or the breaking down of social ladders.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are people in this country who, rather than wanting to empower people, would want to 'de-empower' people. They would want to take power from you, however they could. They create social divisions. There are people in this country who like social divisions. Sometimes these people come from both political parties. Sir, that is a reality.

Sir, the unfortunate thing in this society is that the people who are in the majority, sometimes like to rub shoulders with these people. Sir, these people who like to create social divisions, could sometimes, by design, deny others the opportunity of moving up the social and educational ladders in the society. Therefore, when people take a stand or hold a position on the behalf of these people, sometimes they are not even aware of who they ought to rally behind. They are not aware of those persons who are willing to change things, in order that they be included within the system themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I am not talking about inclusion that is based on any theory, I am talking about genuine participation in the development of this country. This gives people an opportunity, not like in the 1930s, the 1800s or the 1900s. This is a 21st Century effort that gives an opportunity, to make sure that the social barriers are broken

down, in every different area of the social divisions in this country. That is why this is important to me.

Mr. Speaker, even with the limitations of the Community Technology Programme, though it is not the collective position of my colleagues, I am one of the advocates who believes that in terms of the Community Technology Programme, it should be extended, even wider than it is at present.

Sir, I have been saying this over and over again but I can understand financial constraints. I know this is a small country, with an economy that might not allow us to have a broad-based, free post-secondary information technology programme, but I would like to see the State carrying this programme nationally, not only with five or six modules, but extending it to a level, where ordinary people in the streets could have the opportunity to enjoy information technology, at the highest level and not just at the basic level.

Mr. Speaker, there was a time where there was only primary education, then it was extended to fourth form and now it has been taken further. I am one of the men who believes that this programme should be free for all. I believe it should not only be about learning the keys on the computer or knowing the difference between a monitor and a central processing unit, or the functions of the computer. I believe we should go further.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I am going to make sure that I build on what was started before me in this Ministry. I am not going to have the programme extended to only a few communities across Barbados, but I have to extend the programme to the communities of St. Thomas. I want to give the opportunity to the people of Bridgetown and the surrounding areas, to have access to information technology. I want to give the opportunity to every little boy in the street. I want to give the opportunity to those persons, who might not have the best pair of brand-named shoes or the best pair of pants. I want them to come in their khaki pants, ordinary shirt and arm-holed vest, and sit down and learn how to operate the computer.

I also want to do it in St. John, for the Opposition Leader. I want to make him understand, in practical terms, the importance of the programme. Since the Honourable Member cannot understand the theoretical aspect of it, let him see it practically being applied. Let him tell the people, who he represents, that they do not want the programme, that the Government is wasting money. I will allow him to tell the people in St. John that the Government is wasting money on the people improving and making the required adaptations, to suit the new modern business environment around them.

Mr. Speaker, this provides options for people, not only by using information technology to communicate with friends and to have access to information, but it has also given people the opportunity to move up in the workplace. There are young people in this society, who had one CXC certificate, who had abandoned studying. They have now gone back to school, as a consequence of the Community Resource Centres being made available to them.

Mr. Speaker, so far there are fourteen resource centres that are available. The Government is also going to go further and make use of the libraries across Barbados. We are going to put that kind of infrastructure in place, so that persons would not only have to look at books, but can use the computer to acquire information and to communicate with persons as well.

We are now into a joint relationship with the Ministry of Education, in an effort to complement that programme. We are going to be using a number of school plants shortly, to extend that programme, so that we would not have to spend astronomical sums in building new centres across Barbados. Sir, to make sure we have the availability of these resources centres, in the required strategic areas, we are now going to use the school plant.

2.30 p.m.

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Mr. T.A. PRESCOD: The Ministry of Education, in principle, has already agreed to make available to the Ministry of Social Transformation the availability of the internet lab and their cafes in after school hours to respond to the needs of people in the various communities. Sir, over 5 364 persons across Barbados took advantage and completed the courses available to them. Is this not progressive? Are these people ignorant? Are these people who do not understand what they need for themselves? It is important, as a result of these figures for anybody who thinks differently to reconsider his/hers views on this and try to determine who remain ignorant in terms of what is important to society.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to you, it is important in this effort to empower people. I heard the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central giving the impression that just to facilitate people is not enough. Sir, if this is what facilitating means, I am happy to identify with it. I also know there are other words which can be used but he gave the impression that it was a lot of loose jargon about empowerment and enhancement of people, strengthening the human capacity, that there were facilitators and that we were only repeating these terms monotonously.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to believe that I have explained this quite lucidly to any person however narrow the intellect is likely to be, and that person can understand that it is not just using words in a limited sense or using jargon as a poetic expression but that it is a genuine concern for the development of people across Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, this is a programme that ought to be supported by every Barbadian regardless of race or social class but, moreso in particular people who are marginalise and need this opportunity. Sir, this is a form of education that is underpinned by a concern for the development of people than some of other social and economic programmes we have seen in recent times and in times before.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is important about it? You do not have the encumbrance of finance where you have to pay to have access. Sir, all you have to do is sign a form, have the courage to go and learn and make yourself relevant to this time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I am strongly in support of the effort of the Government to continue to expand this programme to look at the geographical spread of the programme and to make sure that not only St. Peter enjoys it but that St. John enjoys it and that St. Philip can enjoy it. Sir, all over Barbados can enjoy it and we have not restricted persons who are non-nationals.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to have our fair share in St. Michael especially in St. Michael Central. Mr. Speaker, I will make sure that you have access for your people. You have had a long commitment to education and this will top off the credit that you ought to be given for the contribution which you have made to the constituency which you represent. It is most unfortunate that the role which you play does not allow you to speak in the way that I am allowed to speak on these matters but my voice is the echo of your voice and rest assured that when I speak, I also speak for The Speaker of the House.

Mr. Speaker, thanks very much for the short time made available to me.

Mr. SPEAKER: the Honourable Member for Christ Church East.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise on what I think is an important debate, one which is very much rooted in the 21st Century. Indeed, this is yet another example of a Government and a political party that has its vision firmly rooted in the future. It has fallen to this administration to undertake a number of fundamental reforms in various aspects of our national affairs. This E-Government Strategy document and the Resolution supporting it is yet another one of such reforms.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that it has been this administration which has undertaken the great reform of both the direct and indirect tax system of Barbados. The introduction of Value Added Tax was the most fundamental reform in taxation since the days of the Arawaks in Barbados. You would recall that it has been this Administration which now proposes this E-Government Strategy. It has been this administration that has cause income tax rates both personal and corporate to plummet in Barbados making sure that this country continues to be the most competitive jurisdiction for investment and for personal living.

Mr. Speaker, it has been this administration that has undertaken a radical reform of our financial sector. There has been greater growth, greater diversity of financial institutions, new financial instruments like 100 per cent mortgages and a range of reform in the financial sector. Sir, I could go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, as a Government moving from the 20th Century to the 21st Century, this has been the reformist Administration and there can be no greater praise where reform is required than in the area of making sure that the Government does not lag behind the private sector and individuals as it relates to the reality of the e-world in which we live. Whilst it is true that Government has over the years utilised computers to perform several of its activities, there has not been to date a clear vision articulated, there has not been until now a strategy document which would seek to leverage the money which we spend on information and communication technology to achieve a few simple but clear objectives.

Mr. Speaker, it is clearly indicated that we are proposing to be able to better deliver services to citizens and businesses, also, via this strategy, we are committing ourselves as a Government to greater productivity and efficiency, the operations of the agencies of the Government. Sir, in doing that, we will also achieve a very important objective as it relates to governance, that is the matter of greater transparency and governance through broadening public participation in governmental processes. Sir, those are the three clear objectives of this E-Government Strategy.

Mr. Speaker, let us also remember that Barbados is not in this alone, that we have to be competitive in all aspects of national endeavour. Indeed, small open island economies such as Barbados, competitiveness and survival are synonymous. We have to be better, faster and smarter than the next country in all aspects of national endeavour whether in the production of goods, food, ability to attract tourists, ability to attract investment or being able to export our goods.

H107/14:40

Sequence 22

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. R.R. FARLEY: Sir, we have to be better than most, if we are to survive in this competitive world. I know that they are some people who believe that we should not be into these modern things such as computers. Sir, I have not heard it in this debate yet, but I can anticipate that there would be some, who would ask how much money are we going to spend on computers and the internet, when that money could be used to build roads or to do this or that.

Asides.

Hon. R.R. FARLEY: Sir, it is that old-time brand of bread and fish politics, that seeks to deal with the instant gratification and desires, though important, but at the end of day, it is important that Barbados' competitiveness must be maintained at all cost.

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that Barbados does not have the luxury of continuing along the old path, or of ignoring new ways of doing the things it currently does, and, indeed, adopting new approaches, because other countries are forging ahead.

Sir, let us take some comparative estimates. There have been a number of international studies, looking at the ability and readiness of Governments, with respect to their e-strategy. Indeed, the United Nations conducted an assessment in 2003 of 191 countries looking at a range of things. For example, they assessed the websites quality, their numbers and use. They examined their telecommunications infrastructure and the human resource development of these countries, with respect to E-Government readiness. Sir, what did they find? They found that the United States of America was in the lead. Of a perfect score of 1, the United States of America index was 0.927, leading in the world, followed by Sweden. 0.840. Mr. Speaker, there was an average score for these 191 countries with respect to E-Government readiness. The average score was 0.402. The score for Barbados was 0.413, ranking 76 in the world, out of the 191 countries.

Sir, I raised that to make the essential point that in this area, as in other areas, the Government of Barbados must not only be paying attention to what it is doing, but paying attention to what other countries are doing and the rate at which they are doing it. Anyway, it is part of the reality of this 21st century, that there has been what I call an internationalisation of domestic policy in many ways. Sir, in many ways, whether you are setting your tax rates, dealing with the level of efficiency, or the speed of progress in your country, you have to be concerned about what is happening in the rest of the world.

Sir, we cannot just speak in isolation about our efforts to attract tourists to Barbados, to satisfy them, to attract international business entities to Barbados, to be the leading financial services sector, or to our ability to export goods and services and not recognise that other countries are leveraging information and communication technology in order to achieve those goals as well. Sir, I want to start there.

Mr. Speaker, this strategy pointing out what Government will do, not only with its own resources and how it deploys the information and communication technology, but also the leadership it would provide, is, to my mind, most important.

Sir, even though this document is coming before Parliament for its noting and approval, that is not to say that we are now starting. Indeed, I want to remind that this Government recognised years ago that there was no technological difference between voice, video and data, and the telecommunication reforms which this Government undertook with much criticism from the Democratic Labour Party and others... Indeed, there was a point at which the opponents of telecommunication reform argued that we should not bother with it at all. There were doubts as to whether it could have achieved. Mr. Speaker, the reality is, with this modern telecommunication infrastructure, new Telecommunication Act, provision of licences, a competitive framework in cellular, domestic and international services, we have seen an explosion, not only in the number of internet users, but we have seen an explosion in the number of cellular phone users. We have seen a reduction in the rates charge for international calls. We have seen a reduction in the rates charge for international leased lines, used by businesses for dedicated voice video and data transfer, and we have seen vast improvements in the area of telecommunication infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, all of what we are talking about today, in terms of E-Government and e-commerce is really built on the telecommunication infrastructure, its physical integrity, band width and cost.

Indeed, one of the most fundamental positive changes to affect Barbados in that regard has been the investment by Tele-Barbados; new under ocean fiber optic cables, providing a combination on the international circuit, but also providing increased band width. The increased speed of access on the internet and matters of that nature are as a result of reforms undertaken by this Government, fitting perfectly into this strategy.

Sir, the reality is, computer use in Barbados is already very high. I would want to even credit this administration with the removal of taxes and duties on computers, because we recognise that this was the way to go, no import taxes or VAT on computers. Mr. Speaker, approximately 57 per cent of people, surveyed in 2004, by

the National Council for Science and Technology, were using computers in Barbados.

Sir, we recognise the digital divide. I want to commend the Ministry of Social Transformation, the Honourable Members for St. Michael South East and St. Michael East, for the work in the Community Technology Programme. Through that programme, approximately 5 000 Barbadians have received training in the use of computers. Sir, it is not the old-time training that you and I would have had years ago, when each computer was seen as a separate entity and you learnt some DOS with very little operation of the computer. This was using the computer as a point of insertion into the worldwide web.

Mr. Speaker, the sea egg sellers in Silver Sands is able to go online and check out the price of a boat, fishing gear or whatever interest they might have. They can go online to talk to fisher folk in Russia, Canada and wherever else. They can go online at the St. Christopher Resource Centre, thanks to the Honourable Members for St. Michael South East and St. Michael East, this Centre is now open. They can go online and shop. They can do whatever they want to do online, Sir.

14.50 p.m.

Sequence 23

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

House 107, Sequence 24, 4.50 p.m.

Continuation of: Hon. R.R. FARLEY:

Sir, I want to salute the Minister for his commitment to expanding that programme around Barbados because it is empowering our people that are at the heart of this Government's E-Government Strategy. We want to ensure that having further enthusiasm, having provided them with the tools, they will not only be able to access resources in the United States of America, Russia and wherever but here in Barbados.

Sir, this is the 21st Century and this Government has committed itself to bringing to an end, the foolishness, which would have us spending so much time to do simple things. Sir, many Barbadians have credit cards. They are able to use the technology. We must enable them to pay for their Government services online and that is along the lines of the commitment of this Government.

Sir, in terms of the Internet, the vast majority of Barbadians have access to the Internet. Sir, some 90 per cent of computer users access the Internet, some 69 per cent at home, and 33 per cent at work, and that, Sir, is as it should be, and add to that, Sir, the 14 Ministry of Social

Transformation Information Resource Centres around Barbados.

Asides.

Hon. R.R. FARLEY: Sir, those of us who have computers at home, may sometimes forget that there are Barbadian households that do not contain computers. Today, Sir, those who have children at school age, would know that there is homework given at school, which requires research, some of which is specifically geared towards the Internet. Sir, without these community resources, provided as part of the Government's strategy, those children's growth and development would be stymied. We are committed, Sir, whether through EduTech, through the Community Technology Programme or this E-Government Strategy, to use technology to improve the lives of our people.

Sir, I want to say that the one area in which the Government has to work more closely with the private sector to show improved results, is in the whole area of e-commerce. Indeed, Sir, the same survey that I made reference to, indicated that e-commerce activity at the household level is relatively low, because Barbadians are still hesitant about buying and selling online. It is also true that there are very few opportunities for Barbadians to buy Barbadian products and services online, whether from the Government or the private sector. Sir, there are Barbadians who buy their books from amazon.com online. There are Barbadians who have their virtual post box in Miami and the books are shipped down to Barbados. Therefore, I do not necessarily agree with this indicator in that study about the lack of confidence. Yes, it is an obviously a need for caution but the reality is that it is in this area of moving from using the Internet for mere purposes of information, to taking it to the next step of actually doing business, so that Barbadian businesses and the Government are yet to reap the fullest benefits.

This Government, Sir, has committed itself to moving to that stage, to actually enable Barbadians to sit in the comfort of their homes or at their work places and do several of the things, which require either the individuals or countless messengers to block up the roads and travel across from Government Department to Government Department dropping in forms, checking on information and paying bills. Indeed, Sir, I must commend the Customs Department for their ASYCUDA upgrade. It is one of the first Government Departments to made provision for online payments by businesses and customs brokers. There is much more that can be done and indeed there is much more that will be done.

Of course, Sir, this always raises the question of security. Perhaps, the United States of America, being the leader in information and communications technology, has

also been the worst possible example of all that could go wrong in this world of information technology. Every now and again, you hear of a laptop being left in a back seat of a car. It goes missing and 30 million names and addresses of veterans, including their medical information, the social security number and the like are compromised. You hear about banks and other financial institutions losing some data and people's information being compromised.

The Government of Barbados clearly intends not to repeat those mistakes made by those countries, and data security will be at the heart of what we do. Indeed, the Electronic Transactions Act and the Data Protection Act have been leading pieces of legislation. I know that the Ministry of Commerce is working on additional legislation to ensure that privacy, security and protection are at their highest. Sir, in addition to legislation, the policies, procedures and technology which are employed in those areas where Government's databases are in use, will be of primary importance within this strategy.

It will not merely be the case of rolling out services for their own sake, but making sure that in that push for speed, in that speed for use, that we do not compromise people's personal data in the way, Sir, that it has been in the case of the United States of America, so that, Sir, we plan to be the world leaders in that particular regard.

Sir, the fundamental point is that this Strategy must be seen with the other strategies, which have been identified and indeed implemented to improve our general investment framework, to make us more attractive, Sir, as a location for several business ventures.

Sir, before I close, I want to say that this E-Government Strategy and indeed the more widespread use of technology, will also have an impact on governance, and indeed, politics and our democracy. We are in the world on e-politics on several different levels. Freedom and democracy are built on access to information. Sir, just like the Stock Market, where people have access to the information, and they make their individual choices, based on openly available information.

Sir, gone are the days when there is, either any inability of people to get access to information, or for there to be a time lag between an event occurring and information about it being available. Indeed, Sir, if you look at how technology has impacted even things like reporting on war, we have moved from war correspondants sending their reports back by boats, airplanes and whatever, to the 24-hour news media being at the front line of the war. But we now have, Sir, the Bloggers who are themselves sending direct, from person to person on the Internet, their personal perspective, not with any fetter of an editor, newspaper policy or things of that nature. But, Sir, if you follow the elections, if you follow politics, as

well, in a number of countries where information technology use is at an all-time high, you would find that this medium has been very much utilised as well.

In every way from the publication by Governments, by political parties and by interesting parties of a range of information, helpful to the public, that is on the positive side, as well as to the not so helpful side of those who would want to use and exploit the information technology. The fact that it is instantaneous, the fact that it is in some cases, untraceable, could also shame and defame individuals.

House 107, Sequence 24, 15:00:14

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: Sir, I certainly hope that we in this country do not descend in that direction. Certainly, the Government will be taking the high road in terms of the information it provides and the use for which we intend to put it.

Sir, the reality is that this is the 21st Century, therefore, all aspects of our national endeavour, from our finance and production to our governance and our democracy, will be affected by what we are doing today. Sir, I am pleased to be part of a Government which has recognised that it needs, in order to have a full buy-in by the public of Barbados, to put together a document and a strategy such as we have here. Sir, this obviously does not contain the details of implementation, and it is not intended to. Sir, clearly the establishment of the central Information Management Agency as a major agency within the Government for the integration of its several existing computer resources, such as the Integrated Portal Project to allow the public of Barbados to have a single point of interface and access across a wide range of Government databases, will make it easier for the ordinary citizen to have access to information about the Government and its activities, which they require.

Sir, it would also make it easier for us in Barbados as we seek to use the worldwide web to let the world know our story, whether by way of cultural expression, making sure that the work and the music of our artistes and musicians particularly in this season of Crop Over...

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see an increasing number of our calypsonians and other performers having web-sites. Indeed, there are some who are now on myspace.com. I believe Alison Hinds recently announced that she is there on myspace. Sir, just like international stars, they are providing regular updates on their lives, what is happening to them and what is going on. Sir, in a way, that is a modern form of promotion.

Sir, I am very pleased that they are all making use of this technology because the world is using it to push their story to us, therefore, we have to use this technology to push back. We have to use it for tourism promotion. We have to use it for investment promotion and for the promotion of our culture and arts. This strategy would make sure that we get the greatest 'bang for our buck'.

Mr. Speaker, as I close, the Ministry of the Civil Service and the Ministry of Commerce, Consumer Affairs and Business Development, two of the main agencies in charge of this project, have been mandated by Cabinet to ensure that no time is lost and to ensure that this E-Government Strategy is able to achieve the objectives, I mentioned earlier bringing better services to our citizens and businesses, increasing the efficiency and productivity of the various Government agencies and enhancing the quality of our governance by creating openness and transparency for the ordinary citizens of Barbados.

For those purposes, Sir, and in the pursuit of achieving those objectives, I am pleased to support this Resolution before us.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

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

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt that there is a need for e-commerce and for e-government. However, one must appreciate that in order to get e-government there must be an expansion of e-commerce. Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the same time when we are trying to achieve an expansion in e-commerce, we must not allow anybody, whether they were former governors of the Central Bank or whether they are advisors to the Government, to propose the contraction of e-government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I say e-government, I mean the human side of the Government that has to work the e-government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we speak of this matter, it is relevant that we must be informed of a speech made by a former Governor of the Central Bank who gave the impression that in order to get efficiency in the Civil Service there must be a contraction. I want to make it clear from this side that we do not agree with that philosophy. We believe that you can get e-government by maintaining the same numbers if you have a true understanding of what you expect to get in developing the country called Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is clear to us that in order to achieve and to move from a 40-hour week or an 8-hour day to a 24-hour day that there must be a need to maintain our expand on the numbers of persons working within the Civil

Service. Mr. Speaker, at the same time we have to understand and appreciate that there must be the relevant increase from the private sector and the productive sectors of Barbados to maintain the level of governance. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we cannot guarantee this country that the private sector will expand e-commerce to such a rate that we can continue to maintain the level of production within the Civil Service, then e-government would not be effective or worthwhile.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt that the move toward e-government will cost a substantial amount of money to implement. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the example for us to learn from is the EduTech programme, which has shown us that once we move to the cutting edge of technology that it is not necessarily the cost of purchasing the hardware and the software, it is the cost to maintaining them.

Sir, after watching the EduTech Programme approach and recognising the substantial amount of money spent on the EduTech Programme, we have to be very careful in this country as we move towards e-government, because we have to understand that there must be and will be budgeting constraints which we have to finance.

Sir, what are we hearing? We have not heard of any programme to expand the foreign exchange earning capacity of the country, yet we speak about e-government as if e-government is only about revenue and it does not bring a foreign exchange cost with it. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying to you today that if this is the approach I am hearing, then e-government will fail.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will listen carefully to the contribution of the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West. I will wait to see how the Honourable Member will fault what I am saying because surely his training will not allow him to fault what I am saying on these particular matters for the simple reason that I am sure that the Honourable Member understands quite clearly what I am speaking about and he cannot go against his training to try to contradict what I am about to say or what I have said.

Mr. Speaker, if that would be so, the Honourable Member will be contradicting the Prime Minister of Barbados. Sir, when one reads what the Prime Minister of Barbados said on Sunday, it is clear that the Prime Minister has agreed that the problem is not a revenue problem but a foreign exchange problem. We have a serious foreign exchange problem and the Prime Minister is comfortable that he can deal with the revenue problem but finds it difficult to deal with the foreign exchange problem. That is exactly what this side has been saying. House 107 Sequence 25

3.10 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is why when the Prime Minister said on Sunday that we need to punish consumption and reward production, I had to wonder who it was that was speaking. I could not have believed that it was the Prime Minister of Barbados, in an article to the daily Nation Newspaper, talking about punishing consumption and rewarding production.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was a good footing. It is obvious to me that the Prime Minister had understood this debate was coming and that he had to protect his soul. Therefore, he laid the foundation, to let this side understand that he is in agreement with us. That is, the Prime Minister understands quite well, that in order to implement e-government, the Honourable Member has to have an understanding with both the private sector and the international players, in order to increase the level of investments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Prime Minister spoke about increasing the level of investment, the Honourable Member was not talking about purchasing more computers for Government. The Honourable Member was speaking about bringing foreign investors into Barbados, which would bring foreign exchange into the country, and that those foreign exchange investments would not be one-off investments but that they would be sustainable. In other words, what the Prime Minister is saying is that the country's productive sectors need to earn foreign exchange and that the Honourable Member would give them the necessary tools to earn that foreign exchange for this country.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying that if there is commonality between the two sides on this issue, the Opposition cannot object to nor reject what the Prime Minister has to say on this issue because the Opposition has been in the forefront on this particular issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister must also not use the Nation Newspaper to make this particular point. The Honourable Member must also come to the Floor of this Honourable House and admit to the Opposition that he should have followed the advice of the Opposition for some time now. Sir, knowing the Prime Minister, as I do, I expect...

Sir, the Honourable Member has sent the warning two budgets ago, that he was quite prepared to adopt the theory, which was given to that philosophy by the Honourable Member for St. James Central. Therefore, I must thank him for giving it such a branding because it is

not only working within the confines of this Parliament but those of us who were at the Conference last week, would have recognised that it has a wider scope and a better understanding within the corridors of elsewhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I am saying is that e-government cannot be the first, we need to speak about e-commerce. We need to understand the importance of e-commerce. Sir, there is no one on that side, who could speak to the Opposition about e-government or about e-commerce. Sir, it was this Opposition, who were speaking about community tourism and about enlightening Barbadians to the fact that because of the computer technology, persons who had properties with additional space, who wanted to promote those properties, there was now no need for them to find somebody in the United States of America, to whom they would have to pay large sums, instead, all they had to do, is to go on the internet and advertise themselves. Sir, for years this side has been saying that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East, not only understands what I am saying, but was able to take that message and market it to his constituents. Now, within Christ Church East, Christ Church South and many other areas, one would find many people adding on to their homes because of the concept given by this side, where we said that a home should be a business and a business should be a home. In other words, we understood the marriage between the two.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, please do not mind my photocopier, the Honourable Member for St. Michael South. The Honourable Member has a way of acknowledging good points by making those comments.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to understand that as a Party, we recognise how mechanisation and the over-utilisation of technology can sometimes take away advantages that one would have. Sir, there is no doubt that the Government of Barbados should have learned a lesson from what happened to the sugar industry. Sir, in the sugar industry, we had a foreign exchange advantage when we were using manual labour, but from the time we turned to automation and mechanisation, we had the reverse, that is, the sugar industry is not now a net earner of foreign exchange. Sir, furthermore, my latest calculations would tell me that the sugar industry is now a net user of foreign exchange because of automation and mechanisation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to be very careful how we over-use the technology, which can impact on the human side of it, without understanding that when you are dealing with the human side, the majority of the cost of servicing the human being is internal cost, whereas the majority of the cost of servicing the technology happens to be external. Sir, I hope the other side could understand this particular argument.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one has to be very careful how we transfer foreign exchange from our own people to external sources, under the concept and belief of efficiency. The question must be asked: Efficiency for whom? Sir, let me give you an example: That cane cutter, when we spend money on him, was spending back the money within the economy, but when we spend the money on the mechanical harvester, every input, apart from the driver, is external.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to be very careful how we analyse these things because we look at the cost from the revenue side, without looking at the foreign exchange side. Therefore, the question are: Which is the more important? Is the foreign exchange more important than the revenue? It is clear to me that we have a decision in the revenue side but we do not necessarily have the same position on the foreign exchange side.

Sir, we have to be very careful how we deal with these matters. Sir, I will say that everything for this country must first be local and when you cannot get it locally, then you look outside.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will never tell you what the Honourable Member for St. Thomas is telling me and what combination she would like me to bring into this debate but at this time, I have no time for that particular argument. If I could get leave from home, I will speak to the Honourable Member later in the evening.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope the approach to this E-Government Strategy would not be the same as that of the cellular phones, which we have adopted. Sir, during this debate, I have heard people talking about cellular phones and using them as an example of improving e-government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell this country that if a serious analysis is done, the cellular phone cannot be a good example. On the other hand, the internet can be a good example. Sir, I am not sure when a cost analysis is done on the cellular phone, that the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West would tell me that could be a

good example, when we speak about the capacity to earn foreign exchange.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to be very careful because there are certain technological changes that occur in this world that we should not buy into. We have to see some, we have to do a shopping list and we have to understand that there are certain things that will increase the foreign exchange earning capacity of this country. We also have to understand that there are certain things that will drain the foreign exchange earning capacity. We have to be very careful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a Government, now that we are turning to this issue of e-commerce and e-governance, we have to understand what impact e-commerce would have on transport.

3.20 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: I thought the first thing that would have been discussed is the impact of e-commerce and e-trade on transport. If you are telling me that everything can now be done by the householder by putting a computer in the house, it means you are saying that there is no need for a large amount of persons to use the Transport Board or the other services provided like ZRs and minibuses because there would be no need to.

Sir, if you can stay at home and do all these things, it means there is no need to travel. It also means that there would be a reduction in the revenues of the Transport Board and somebody not understanding the social responsibility of Government would ask the Transport Board to increase its revenue, which would affect the consumer and the 'Minister of bus fares' will come to this House asking for an increase in bus fare and the Prime Minister would not be able to reverse it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to understand that we are not only dealing with the glossy side of things but we must deal with everything in totality. Sir, this side is prepared to look at every side of the argument and that is exactly what we have done today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member laid a good case to this Parliament and we will substantiate it because we understand exactly what we have to do on this side and we will educate the side of the Government if they do not understand. Sir, the Government side should never believe that they are fooling us on this matter in this debate and believing that we do not understand that they are

searching to get information to finalise the document. Sir, that is the reason for the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a few weeks ago, the impression was given in this House that the Opposition is not capable of debating anything even when they are given weeks to do so.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: That was the impression created by the Government. We were told that the papers were circulated months ago and that we did not want to debate it. Mr. Deputy Speaker, today we came to this House and there are two matters but we were given less 48 hours to debate. The Government side was able to tell us that page 53 spoke about immigration, which tells me that the side of the Government was fully aware of this particular document. They went through it with the Social Partners and everybody but they expected us in less than 48 hours to come to this Parliament and deal with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here dealing with the matter...

Hon. K.D. SYMMONDS: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. I do not wish to get into the issue of how much time the Honourable Member might have had or not. I would say that when I learnt to read, I was told that you begin with a Table of Contents. If you go to the Table of Contents, you will see Immigration at page 53, so it is not a discovery of great merit on the part of the Honourable Member for St. Lucy. It only suggests that despite our own suspicion, perhaps he did not actually graduate with primary level education.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the substantial point is that I am proud of the lead person who spoke on the particular matter because even though the notice was short, the Opposition has demonstrated that at any time that anything is placed before this House with proper notice that we are ready to debate it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I agree with the Honourable Member for St. Michael North East that the Cabinet style of Government is dominating this Parliament. It is clear that once decisions are made at Cabinet that they are not enough numbers in here to reverse them. This means that in situations like these, that the Opposition is caught up in the Cabinet style of Government even though we are not part of Cabinet. Sir, once Cabinet decides that there is no timing for the Opposition or the Backbench, the decision is made and we have to tow the line. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it does not reflect on the Opposition but, Sir, in my opinion, it reflects on you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we appreciate there must be changes. We agree that in order for changes to occur that the foreign exchange base of this country must be increased. The Honourable Member for St. Michael South, who has the responsibility for the leading foreign exchange earning Ministry and I expect him to get up in this House today and tell us, now that the Government is seeking to implement E-Government, how his Ministry will lead in earning foreign exchange for the country to properly implement E-Government.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: If you told me I would not understand but if I told you, you would understand and beam it to the Barbados Tourism Authority.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the first things Government would have to do is to set out a budget on the cost of the hardware for implementing this programme as well as the cost of the software. Government will also have to come with a budget to deal with the upkeep because anyone who understands what is happening would understand that substantial cost would be incurred later on after fully implementing E-Government.

Mr. Speaker, I have said before that we have the example of EduTech, which was a good concept but in order to fully implement EduTech, one would have to revolutionise the earning of foreign exchange in this country to be able to sustain it. Sir, you cannot implement EduTech without first looking at the productive forces to put them right because it would be like putting the cart before the donkey. I do not want the same thing to occur now with E-Government.

Sir, E-Government must come but we must first look at the productive forces and deal with them. If any Honourable Member on the other side wants to make sport at the comments which I made, he would not be making sport at the Honourable Member for St. Lucy but at the Honourable Member for St. Peter. If the Honourable Members would understand what was said by the Honourable Member for St. Peter on Sunday in the Nation newspaper, they would understand exactly what I now say.

Mr. Speaker, if any Honourable Member on the other side says that I am talking foolishness, he cannot be referring to the Honourable Member for St. Lucy but to the Honourable Member for St. Peter. Sir, were the Honourable Member for St. Peter here, I am wondering if the Honourable Member for St. Michael South would make these comments in like of what I said previously of what the Honourable Member for St. Peter had to say about the earning capacity of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, we have to look at those industries which we have to put interest in and we have to increase their capacity in order for them to bring the requisite foreign exchange to allow us to service G-Government.

H107/15:30

Sequence 27

Tuesday, July, 25, 2006

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: *Asides*

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please address the Chair.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Sir, in order to service E-Government, we must be able to increase the capacity of e-commerce. It is from e-commerce that E-Government would gain its survival.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, no where in the record, will you find that the sugar industry declined on mechanisation. The end result might prove to be true, but I never said that. I said that the sugar industry, moved from a net foreign exchange earner to a net foreign exchange loser, that is something quite different. Again, the Honourable Member was telling us that Nassco was able to beam to Japan. He was more interested in that point, than hearing what I had to say on that particular matter.

Sir, as a Party, we have to ask whether it is the Dr. Blackman's approach, where you rid the Civil Service of 10 000 civil servants to achieve E-Government, or is it the Democratic Labour Party's approach where you implement E-Government, while still maintaining the number of civil servants, because you are now moving from an eight-hour shift to a twenty-four-hour shift, with the understanding that there might be an increase in the number of persons working in the civil service, as a result of the 200 per cent increase. Is it that, Sir?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government wants us to believe that they will increase the Government service by 200 per cent efficiency, while their advisor is telling us that to increase by 200 per cent, you should send home 10 000 people.

Sir, is it that the technological changes are now acting out of the interest of the human being within the civil service? I am saying it should not. The technological changes, should be acting as an ancillary service to the human being. Instead of getting rid of the civil servants, efficiency should be occurring. In other words you will be

receiving information faster, but you will still have people to disseminate the information to the masses in Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, E-Government cannot be a negative to civil servants or to the citizens of Barbados. Sir, E-Government must allow the masses in Barbados to achieve what they want quicker while allowing civil servants a better opportunity to deliver those services to the masses in Barbados, but there must be a cost.

Sir, I want to hear from the Government, how they will finance this cost. I am not talking about the cost of buying a computer in Barbados dollars. I am talking about buying those computers and services in foreign exchange. If we now have half a million-dollar deficit in foreign exchange, when we move to E-Government, surely it will increase. If the Honourable Prime Minister has a headache in financing that half million-dollar deficit, with e-commerce, it will be a greater problem. We need to find out how we will finance that division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you know, major companies in Barbados, whenever they have a computer problem, send for experts from outside of Barbados, even though the experts tap into the services of the locals. Sir, even though the locals provide the knowledge to the experts, the foreign exchange leaves the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying that we on this side fully understand what has to occur to get E-Government, and we understand that e-commerce must be correct first. There must be a budget in place. It cannot be 'fancy foot' talk. There must be a situation where this project is brought to this Parliament, showing the assets and liabilities, the revenue and expenditure, so that we could come to a sensible conclusion on this particular matter.

Sir, we do not buy into the Government's approach, neither do we buy into the Dr. Courtney Blackman's approach, on this particular matter. We would prefer to side with the Democratic Labour Party's approach on this particular matter.

I am grateful to you, I thank you.

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

Mr. C.A. MASCOLL: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not easy to come down out of cyberspace sometimes. I am hoping to make a contribution to this debate that bears relevance to the context of the debate. Certainly, the whole question of E-Government is really just the adoption of technology in the pursuit of Public Sector Reform in Barbados. It cannot be achieved in any other way, because what is really required is a transformation within the public

service. The only effective way in which it can be done is through the adoption of technology.

Sir, I think that we all know that societies and economies have been transformed historically as a result of technology, therefore, what we may witness in Barbados is not going to be vastly different to the experiences of several countries and societies in history.

I do not know how you can begin to speak about the adoption of E-Government, then make a quantum leap towards a discussion on foreign exchange reserves. Perhaps, I am yet to see the correlation and perhaps in the fullness of time I would be able to join the Honourable Member for St. Lucy. I cannot as yet see the quantum leap.

It is important for Government to adopt new technologies, to use computers in order to deal with the whole question of competitiveness. In fact, I think that I would have spent some time over the last several years, talking about the need to enhance productivity in the public service, in order to narrow the gap between the public sector and the private sector productivity, as a means of dealing with overall efficiency in the economy, and by extension enhancing the competitiveness of the Barbados economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see this really as a necessary step, in the pursuit of enhancing productivity and efficiency in Barbados and more important, simply being able to be in a position to cope with the rest of the region. This is really something we cannot avoid. The whole question of how do we effectively see E-Government in an environment in which we have not yet really adjusted to the level of technology that is available in the context of our households.

As I speak, Barbados is still not yet up-to-date with respect to the use of technology at the level of the household, therefore, I would think that we will have to try and provide some environment in which, even if the more current generations within the 20,30, or 40 years cohort may not be so equipped, that there is still opportunity for us as a country to bring several other persons on board in preparation for a new world, in preparation for a world that is technologically driven.

05.15 p.m.

Sequence 28

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

House 107, Sequence 29, 3.40 p.m.

Continuation of: Mr. C.A. MASCOLL:

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this regard there is no doubt that there are programmes. In fact, recently on returning from Washington, I discussed with the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister, the whole question of making accessible to school children, a laptop. This is a project that is being delivered and funded by the IADB. A Professor Nicholas Negroponte of MIT has, in fact, embarked on a programme that will make available to children in Africa and the Latin American area, laptops that can be purchased for less than US\$200 each.

Sir, you have to understand that for what it is worth. You are really saying that in order to truly make a society computer literate, in order to truly make a society truly technologically driven, persons must be able to have access. Therefore, it must be accessible at a cost that is affordable to the majority.

In that context therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that we have a very good opportunity as a country, as was discussed with the leadership of the Party to get on board and make available, for a fee less than BDS\$400 and if there are 20 000 school children in Barbados, it would only cost \$8 million to make available to each and every school child, a laptop using wireless facilities.

In fact, Professor Negroponte was able to suggest that in remote parts of Africa, he has been able to make available to young children, a laptop, using wireless technology and as a consequence of that, exposed children, not only to potential E-Government up ahead, but also to e-books, where all your books can actually be brought on board on a computer.

What he was suggesting, in fact, is that it makes learning easier and more fun, because one was born with an advantage to learn. It is a question of accessibility. If you put computers in a remote village of Africa, among four-year-old and five-year-old African children, then they have equal competence to acquire skills that are available in the developed world. It is in that context, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I see bringing technology to societies as an advantage, regardless of whether or not you may be currently a developed country or developing country.

In fact, he was able to suggest that using other types of technology, he would be able to link networks, or make networks among villages in remote parts of Africa, because you can simply beam your transmission to a satellite, and you do not have to have an infrastructure that is physical and has to be set up all over the village. The very use of satellites can therefore accommodate a widespread use of laptops and technology, even in the most remote areas of Africa and Latin America.

I therefore see that we have an opportunity to embark on such a road, because the only way in which we

can effectively fully make this society technologically aware, is if the children are going to be fully exposed in every way, to the use of information technology. Therefore, it would truly complement what is being currently done with EduTech, what is being done with the Community Development Technological Programme, and what is being done within the private sector.

The important thing to note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that E-Government can assist in transforming the public sector, and bringing it in line with the private sector in such a way that it enhances the productivity, not only of the Government, but the entire economy.

I therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, wish to speak to an issue that has not been addressed in this debate. Because at the centre and heart of E-Government would be, how do we measure, not only the increase productivity, but how do we measure the productivity and performance of the public servant.

Sir, in the absence of being able to measure, whether or not the use of E-Government has in fact translated into greater efficiency and productivity of the worker, and by extension the sector, we would not be able to measure its overall impact on the economy, and by extension, the society.

In the public sector of Barbados, you can basically classify workers into three areas, the clerical worker, the technical worker and the administrative worker. If you are able to do that, it means that you can better use the whole question of measurements across a wider area of the public sector and, therefore, be able to compare the performance of the various civil servants, within the respective Ministries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you can appreciate, workers in the Ministry of Agriculture would be doing a task completely different from workers in the Ministry of Education. Therefore, to a large extent, the work in the Government sector is not homogeneous. How therefore are you going to put a system in place that allows all workers to effectively participate in an exercise of the Government, and yet be able to measure their contribution to the overall increase of output and efficiency of the public sector? How are you going to be able to compensate workers, who are now adopting new technology to enhance their outfit?

Sir, the extent to which you can measure the performance of the worker, will determine the extent to which workers will buy into this whole question of E-Government, and how it can overall affect the performance of the public sector of Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that the work being done currently to allow the Civil Service to be able to

measure the overall performance of the civil servant, within the respective ministries would be enhanced by this whole question of the adoption of E-Government. It is the only way that we could go on a journey of overall improvement of the competitive edge of this Barbados economy and by, extension, giving greater opportunity to the society at large.

There is no evidence whatsoever that there would be any decline, as a result of the adoption of E-Government of the size of the public sector. In fact, I have argued for years that there is no need for any reduction in workers within the public service of Barbados. What is required is that the private sector becomes such an engine of growth that over time, the public sector, as a proportion of the economy, gets smaller.

Therefore, life is relative. It is not about absolutes. It is about relativity. If you can create the environment which is being created, in terms of restructuring the sugar cane sector, in terms of repositioning the tourism sector, then what you are saying is that over time, the public sector as a proportion of the economy, is going to shrink. This is precisely what you are seeking to achieve, because we all know that the engine of growth in any economy has to be where the productive investment is occurring, and that will simply be predominantly in the public sector.

Government is responsible for human capital development, predominantly and Government therefore has to see to it that primary school children get an opportunity to be exposed early to technology. Sir, no matter what we may feel, once you reach a certain age, you do not embrace technology in the same way that children embrace technology.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may feel as though you may have greater intellectual competence than a child but I am going to tell you, that if you put a computer on a desk and tell a child to go in and explore, and you give yourself a computer, that you are no way going to keep up with the capacity of that child to embrace new knowledge. It is simply because your brain has already absorbed too much, and does not have the space to absorb what a child can absorb.

House 107, Sequence 29, 15:50:40

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. C. A. MASCOLL: All it is, is the ability to absorb new knowledge. It is the reason, in many instances, why you do not bring people who have had exposure in certain areas or jobs to work in an environment where you are hoping to be able to shape their mind and shape and influence what they do because it becomes difficult to unlearn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the freshness of a child's brain allows for greater absorption of knowledge and by extension a quicker capacity to learn. It is a natural outgrowth of life. There are hardly many things that you could do better in your later years of life. Therefore, I can see no issue at all, even in the absence of not being given 48 weeks of notice, why you cannot recognise the correlation between E-Government and Public Sector Reform.

In fact, if you are truly thinking about how to prepare this society and this economy for the future, if you are truly thinking about becoming the next Government, you do not have to have 48 weeks in order to appreciate the importance of e-government in this new economy and you do not have to have 48 weeks in order to understand why this is extremely critical to the whole process of Public Sector Reform.

Mr. Speaker, nothing is transformed unless there is a major event, whether it is a war, an epidemic or technology. There has to be something major to actually have a transforming impact on a society and an economy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the context in which I saw the whole question of Cricket World Cup. There is nothing to run from.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the absence of having to focus on creating an environment that is one of excellence, it would have required a major effort outside of a product and an end result to allow for us to make the kinds of strides that we are making. In the absence of that, people do not simply get on board, people get on board to execute or to produce a product. Therefore, in this sense, technology will be the thing that really transforms the public sector of Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, unless that is done, I cannot think of any other thing that is going to do it because simply human resource development is not going to do it. Simply sending persons to train and come on board in terms of computer and technology is not going to do it because the extent to which you have to now train and to retool people cannot be done willy-nilly, it has to be done in a major way and in a transforming way. Therefore, it is because of e-government that you would begin to see in the public service of Barbados that which we have all been talking about; enhancing the efficiency and the overall productivity of the public sector. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it could only happen, if it is going to happen at all, on a large scale.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have discussed before that you cannot expect in a workforce of 28 000 to 30 000 people to train only 1 500 and see a major difference. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you have technology that is going to be available to all workers and available immediately, then it

could do the kind of transforming work that you are hoping to achieve with e-government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I therefore have no difficulty in appreciating that this is an actual outgrowth of the need to pursue Public Sector Reform. However, it has to be accompanied by methods that can actually measure the productivity of the worker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not have the time to elaborate on a system but I know for sure that work is being done to classify the workforce of the public sector into clerical work, technical work and administrative work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also know that there has to be consistency across the departments of Government for e-government to work. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also need to look at the whole question of how do we compensate workers who have done well, who have performed beyond average and beyond good and how do we compensate people who have done excellently.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you have a system that simply gives you an increment at the end of the year irrespective of whether or not you have performed and all persons get such an increment, how do you distinguish between the person who has done excellently and the person who has only performed in an average way? Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you cannot, in the process of the introduction of e-government, be able to analyse and assess the performance of workers in a technologically driven age and if you cannot identify certain people for special reward because of the efforts that they have made, then how do you drive the process of excellence which you are seeking to drive within the public service? Mr. Deputy Speaker, people will only respond if they are adequately rewarded for the effort that they make, that is a natural thing in life as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you do not work hard unless you perceive that there is going to be some kind of reward at the end of it, and you do not try to be better than your fellow worker unless you believe that there is an advantage to be gained. If you are simply going to get an increment for being part of the Civil Service on a yearly basis, how do you encourage persons to perform beyond the average or beyond the good. How do you drive people to really perform excellently within the public sector of Barbados?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see it in the future as also being able to put a system in place that permits for shining lights to be adequately rewarded within a system that is going to be driven more and more, increasingly so, by the use of technology. That would give the sort of transforming environment that has to occur within the public service for there to be an overall benefit to the Barbados economy and the society on the whole.

Mr. Speaker, there are several aspects of this e-government that have been identified. We have currently across the Civil Service the SmartStream Programme, which I had to confess not too long ago when I visited the Inland Revenue Department, that is a tremendous change from the early 1990s. Mr. Deputy Speaker, having worked at the Central Bank and having worked during the International Monetary Fund Programme I know, that in actual fact it was difficult.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the major problem affecting Barbados in those early days was to demonstrate how on an ongoing basis Barbados' fiscal deficit was being financed, because the information was not readily available in the system. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is possible now on an almost daily basis to know precisely where money is in the system and where the financing is coming from.

I am suggesting to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that 14 years ago that was not possible because it was a question of having to manually go through a paymaster account as opposed now to being able to have direct access online to information from all quarters of the Civil Service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the SmartStream Programme has a human resource management element to it that has not yet been developed. If the Accountant-General can sit at her desk and be able to assess the work of several persons within her department from her desk, do you understand the potential of a system driven by technology for enhancing the productivity of the public service? The Accountant-General in Barbados could sit at her desk and know what each and every worker in the department is doing at any given time simply by being able to go online. As a consequence of all of that, she is in the most remarkable position to be able to assess the overall performance of her staff. That can actually happen across the entire system.

House 107 Sequence 30

4.00 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know what has been happening recently? Sir, people have sought ways to try to trick the system. Even though it may be delayed justice, the SmartStream System is clever enough to be able to eventually determine whether or not a person had been cheating the system. It may take some time and no system that is put in place is going to be fool-proof.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, the reason I suspect we have law and lawyers, is that there will always be crimes, people will always try to trick the system. In addition, the one

thing that cannot be legislated is honesty. Therefore, no matter what you do, people will always try their best to evade or to avoid the system but certainly the system itself is an improvement on what obtained 14 or 15 years ago and before, within the public sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Automated System for Customs Data(ASYCUDA) at the Bridgetown Port, even though it currently cannot and does not effectively deal with the issue of duty-free goods at Customs, because of the warehousing effect that occurs in the duty-free sector where, in fact, when certain goods are brought into Barbados, they can be warehoused. Therefore, only when they are being put on the shelves or sold, are they taken out of the warehouse. Sir, the ASYCUDA system does not have a capacity to deal with that. Therefore, it is possible, even with the use of technology, that there are firms around Barbados, which should be paying even greater levels of taxes into the Government coffers. These have been able to skillfully avoid the payment of certain duties, which they are taking, but have not been passing them onto the Government of Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in many instances, it is believed by some members of staff of the Customs that there are several millions of dollars being owned by duty-free companies in Barbados. These companies have not found it fit to put the duties they have collected into the Consolidated Fund, because there is an element of dishonesty, which has to be addressed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other technologically-driven programmes that are being used by Government but we need to be in a position to fully computerise or to fully adopt the use of information technology, in order to bring about the kind of quantum leap, that is required within the Public Sector of Barbados, that will give an impetus to the whole question of the pursuit of competitiveness within the Barbados economy, that had been sought for a long time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we cannot, in anyway, believe that Government has to continue or should continue to lag behind the Private Sector. It is not about there being any better quality persons working within the Public Service, it is simply about being able to be more flexible and adopting technology more readily and quickly within the private sector, than within the public sector, that has created the gap that currently exists.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that gap is responsible for the increasing size of Government's inefficiencies, not only in Barbados and the Caribbean but throughout the world. The inefficiencies in the Public Sector of the United States of America are responsible for the continued growth of the Public Sector. Sir, they might be able to hide theirs because there are several different tiers of Government, contrary to what I heard in hear. There is local Government, there is

State Government and then there is Federal Government, and taxes are collected at every different stage of the process. Therefore, the governments' contributions, in developing countries, are no larger than what occurs in the developed world. In Canada, there is provincial tax, State tax and local tax. Therefore, the question of the level of taxation is no less in those developed countries. Those countries have found ways to execute expenditure that differ from our circumstances in Barbados, but that does not matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what matters ultimately, is the ability of the Government to utilise those resources, to give expression to the pursuit of economic growth and to the pursuit of social services, such as education and health. Therefore, the overall use of a government's dollar is what would differentiate it from that of the other country, and not the actual collection of the dollar but how a government uses it dollar.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the context of Barbados - which is still the number one developing country in the world, which has been able to provide education for all of its citizens, from primary, through to tertiary, and which has been able to provide health at the level that is the envy of several countries around the world - there are very few people, even if they wish to criticise Barbados, who, when they look at it globally, who would not respect how Barbados has made strides over the years and how it continues to provide for its citizenry, in a way that other countries cannot, and in a way that other countries, notwithstanding their wealth, have not been able to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a simple example: for all the petrol dollars in Trinidad and Tobago, the social service delivery in Trinidad and Tobago is nowhere close to that of Barbados. For all the petrol dollars in Venezuela, the social services delivery is not the same. Therefore, what we are saying is that if we could bring information technology to bear on the way in which we govern, on the way in which we run the Public Sector, persons would begin to understand the efficiencies that could be derived, in terms of the spending of our tax dollar and its capacity to reach those, who we want the tax dollar to reach, and then the overall impact, not only on the economy but the society.

Sir, at the end of the day, a politician's real remit is not in economic growth or in foreign exchange earning capacity. It is in its ability to take care of its most vulnerable citizens. That is the real purpose for being involved in politics.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Honourable Member has one minute.

Hon. C. A. MASCOLL: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. Sir, the question, therefore, is: How does

Government so spend its tax dollars, so that it reaches as far as it could, in delivering services to those, who will never be able to get beyond a certain threshold of life but for whom Government feels ultimately responsible?

Mr. Speaker, it is a mission of any Government that has a heart. It is the mission of any Government that understands its origins. It is the mission of any Government that understands the future and the potentials for greater vulnerabilities, caused by all of what we are seeing, such as the Caribbean Single Market and Economy and the World Trade Organisation. These are the constraints for economic governance but our focus must still be - which is why we need to enhance our focus with the use of technology - on the efficient use of every dollar collected by Government, to ensure that it is spent on those most in need of that dollar.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. N. A. LYNCH: Mr. Deputy Speaker, first of all, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to contribute a number of points to a debate that I consider to be very important one, certainly in the history and in the march towards being the develop State that we should be, approximately within the next five years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating the Ministry responsible for E-Government policy and the stage to which we have been able to reach, under this particular Ministry and particular Minister, in creating, articulating and tabling a policy that is destined to move us even further ahead, as we continue on our march to develop status.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not often that I would disagree with the Honourable Member for St. James Central, but I think in his presentation, the Honourable Member spoke about being on the cusp of technological advancement.

4.10 p.m.

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Hon. N A. LYNCH: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not on the cusp, we are already in that age and living in a dynamic age of technological advancement. I am presently reading a text called "The Short History of Nearly Everything" and I recommend it to Honourable Members on the other side who do not read anything at all. It is written by a man called Bill Bryson. His quest is for answers relative to where we are and he gets involved in Physics and Chemistry. Sir, Mr. Bryson is seeking a concept of creating freedom from the known. I advise Honourable Members to get it from Barnes and Noble. Sir, when the Honourable Member for St. Lucy is on one of his

expensive trips, he should go into a bookstore and get something to read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to focus on the concept of E-Government and its relevant to concepts like e-commerce and e-governance overall. The doom-sayers in the Opposition, who are never known to be forward in their thinking, do not understand that the concept of e-governance is grounded fundamentally in ensuring the positive future development of our citizens. Sir, that is the overall spectrum in which it is couched. I agree that you could reduce the concept of e-governance to a man standing in a line at the Immigration Department because it is relevant but, Sir, to reduce a debate as substantial and fundamental as this, about the future development of our citizens, to some man renewing a passport standing up in the immigration line is to bring the debate down to a level that is unbelievable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard the first speaker on the side of the Opposition relate to this. I am convinced that it is an important aspect of the debate the real issue is not about that because, eventually that particular process will be accelerated but we should not try to reduce something as fundamental as this debate to a man standing in line at the Immigration Department.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this comes from an Opposition that never had a passion for the development of people. We have reached this point with an administration which has a sense of mission and a flare for innovation and this is why we are here. Sir, the Democratic Labour Party had opportunities like this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are seeking through this process, apart from the fundamental, goals and objectives laid out...

Asides.

Hon. N A. LYNCH: Sir, you do not need 48 hours, eight weeks or ten weeks. If you are a potential Government, you should be able to articulate your particular policy, agree or disagree with concepts relative to E-Government. This is not anything to lift that is intellectual heavy that you need six weeks for which to prepare. Sir, you either have a policy or you do not have a policy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this instance I am convinced that the Democratic Labour Party, as usual, has no idea of what we are talking about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the concept is that we are seeking the public to buy into the goals set out in the E-Government Strategy. Sir, it is simply grounded in the operational facility and flexibility as a reaction to a changing times in which we live. The Honourable Member trying to beat up on EduTech and its delivery but, at the

end of the day, EduTech is not about computers. Sir, EduTech is really about the operationalising of the White Paper on Education, which was laid in this Parliament for Honourable Members to see. It is about a new concept of the delivery of education to our citizen preparing them for a new age and it has its issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, debilitating effects which the DEMS, through their wasteful efforts have had on this society when they had the opportunity to change Barbados have left us in intellectual bankruptcy, which is evident by the speeches made here today, particularly from the Honourable Member for St. Lucy. Sir, what did they leave us with? They left Barbadians with unfulfilled expectations and doubts, so do not let us get mixed up about where they are going or where they intend to take Barbados, if they ever get the Government back.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the concepts which have been laid out and put into this strategy really married the efforts of public and private sector relative to moving the country forward in a new age. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy wanted to know how to marry the concept of the productive capacity of a society and the productive sectors with e-governance. If you take tourism as an example, it must be exposed to emerging developing countries through specific financial instruments. This can easily be facilitated through a concept of electronic means.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the ordinary citizen, advice of planning, retirement, banking, credit and lending, estate planning, all these are issues, which are fundamentally important to people, are the ones being brought to the fore. Sir, even the concepts of measuring and monitoring where you are going are the ones being brought to the fore through concepts and strategies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue must never be that of technology because it is about living and development. It is not a lot about the hardware and software but the focus must be that it is a way of life that we must fall into in Barbados. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy, 'techno-peasant' that he is, is creating a techno-phobia across the society about how much the computers cost and about how people are going to lose their jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, people have already dealt with all the fears of the concept of mechanisation. I cannot believe that in a modern age that a 'techno-peasant' like the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, would want to infuse those issues of doubt on the Barbadian society that computers would make people lose jobs. He then gives an analogy about cane cutters as opposed to mechanisation of the cane fields, that the money goes overseas to buy machines, that people lose their jobs and that it is a strain on the foreign exchange reserves.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a simple example of how the advancement in technology aids the concept of productivity and gives you a better opportunity to be able to earn even more in a more productive and efficient way is lost on the Honourable Member. Sir, in this day and age, to try to scare Barbadians by telling them that they would lose their jobs and how much strain it would put on the foreign exchange reserves to be able to buy hardware and software shows that he does not understand the concept of E-Government.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Sir, it is quite obvious that the debate has reached a level which the Honourable Member for St. Michael South does not comprehend.

H107/16:20

Sequence 32

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Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: It is clear that when I spoke about our ability to retain foreign exchange, rather than losing foreign exchange, the Honourable Member became confused with job replacement. The Honourable Member also made the comment that I am a peasant. I have no regret being a peasant. The Honourable Member does not appreciate small people. Sir, peasant means a small suppliers of cane.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member, what is the point of order.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: That the Honourable Member was misleading the Honourable House.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member, thank you. Proceed Honourable Member.

Hon. N.A. LYNCH: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was very clear. I do not think that I was speaking Dutch. Sir, symbolism and the like, are lost on the Honourable Member for St. Lucy. The concept of being a 'techno-peasant', is beyond him. He does not understand its symbolism, but that is neither here nor there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issues that were raised by the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, centred around mechanisation and the concept of the loss of jobs. It is not how the mechanisation could improve the productivity of that particular sector, while, enhancing its earning or ability to earn. The issue has not been about how mechanisation helps those that are involved in the industry to be retrained in another aspect ...

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House, by giving the impression that mechanisation has improved the sugar industry. The records will show that since the sugar industry has been mechanised, there has been a decline in sugar production and not an increase. Sir, if the Honourable Member wants to contend with me, he needs to find a better example, than that particular example.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member, proceed.

Hon. N.A. LYNCH: Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, the issue is the whole concept of techno-phobia that has been introduced in the society. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy was the one who introduced the issue of mechanisation. He spoke about the loss of jobs, spending foreign exchange overseas and the net benefit to the society.

Sir, the point I am seeking to make, is that the Honourable Member could not even work out in his mind, that these advances and technology, rather than eliminating people or taking people out of the mix, ensure that people have a greater and longer lasting say in the development of the society. That is the point I was making. The Honourable Member attempted to make everybody believe that the introduction of mechanisation, would displace people. That is the point we are talking about. Sir, that is the kind of techno-phobia that comes from a 'techno-peasant'.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the Honourable House by giving the impression that when the sugar industry was mechanised, people were not replaced. The facts are. There are hardly any cane cutters, cane tiers or loaders in Barbados. If the Honourable Member wants to say that I have misled the Honourable House, then he must tell Barbadians how many cane cutters, cane tiers, and loaders they were before mechanisation, and how many there are now.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member, proceed.

Hon. N.A. LYNCH: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this habit of constantly harping on the poor man and the protection of the poor, yet the Honourable Member would not even know a poor man if he met one. Sir, the concept of increased funds to implement EduTech and the approach to to budgetary constraints, and that there is nothing to expand the foreign exchange earning capacity of the society and of the Government, is so much nonsense, that I do not think it even deserves to be part of the debate.

Sir, with reference to community tourism, what will happen is that rather than paying someone overseas, you can now use the internet to help people to create small places. There is nobody that is against the concept of community tourism as a fundamental plank.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Honourable Member challenged me on the Floor of this Honourable House. He also went to St. Peter and said that he did not want \$20 tourists in this country, when people spoke about community tourism, so what nonsense is the Honourable Member speaking?

Hon. N.A. LYNCH: The tourism sector has always been at the cutting edge of new and emerging technologies for the delivery of service. To think that you can deliver the tourism receipts that we receive, simply through the community tourism, is the issue. The issue has nothing to do with whether community tourism is relevant.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Honourable Member has statistics in his Ministry that tells him that it is not now the sea, sun and sand anymore. The people of Barbados and the concept of community tourism are now driving tourism in Barbados.

It is regrettable that the Minister of Tourism would come and make a statement like this and play down community tourism, when he has information in his Ministry which says that it is not sand, sea and sun anymore, that it is the people and community that are driving tourism in Barbados

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you have made your point. Proceed, Honourable Member.

Hon. N.A. LYNCH: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really would like some protection to be able to speak, again, these are constant nonsensical interruptions.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member, proceed.

Hon. N.A. LYNCH: Sir, the tourism industry has always been at the cutting edge of the delivery of tourism services to the people. The matter of dealing with people, nobody has ever disputed the importance of the community and its relevance. The question always has to be, how do you deliver to the masses and the people with whom we do business overseas? How do we deliver the best service possible? The reality is, the tourism services have always been delivered through the best efforts of technology, and that is something that the 'techno-peasant' from St. Lucy would never understand.

Sir, I make that point in here again.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: On what point do you rise?

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the Honourable House again. He is giving the impression that it is technology that has driven tourism in Barbados. It is because of the 'techno-peasants' in Barbados that the tourism industry was able to increase. Sir, check the Visitor or Sun Seeker magazines and you will see that whenever you ask tourists about what they like about Barbados, they say the 'techno-peasants'.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member, proceed.

Hon. N.A. LYNCH: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the bottom line is, information and communication technology (ICT) is really revolutionising the way governments operate, and Barbados is no different, simply, enabling them to deliver more efficient services to their customers, in a streamline way that allows for greater efficiencies.

Sir, the question is, how do we as a society adapt to the dynamics of those emerging technologies? How are we able to improve the competitive edge of the Government of Barbados, vis a vis, our neighbours, and those who want to invest in Barbados as a developing society? Those are the realities.

The realities are, how does E- Government help to expand the productive and earning capacity of Barbados and how do we continue to create better avenues for human capital development, which is fundamental to the progress of a small developing society. Those are the topics that we should be debating. Sir, telling people about a man standing in a line at the Immigration Department, and community tourism are really not the issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this society, the broad goals that have been set out by the Government of Barbados, are really the ones that we should be focusing for better delivery of service. The broad goals outlined in the E-Government Strategy are better delivery of services to our citizens and businesses, greater productivity and efficiency in the operations of government agencies and greater transparency and governance, through broadening public participation in the governmental process.

16.30 p.m.

Sequence 33

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

House 107, Sequence 34, 4.30 p.m.

Continuation of: Hon. N.A. LYNCH:

Mr. Deputy Speaker, how do you marry the efforts of E- Government, relative to those who really trade in the business sector.

In an age, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of freer movement of people, freer movement of capital, global branding, those issues that determine the success of our society, it is important for us, as a Government to create this E-Government platform to move us forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is in response to the Honourable Member for St. Lucy in his query about how we are going to deliver in the tourism industry. A national tourism organisation in this day and age, which simply is a provider of information, even if through an electronic means, is simply going to be a dinosaur in the future. What you really want to be able to do, is not only just to deliver information, but to be able to actually transact business by some form of electronic means.

In other words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Barbados Tourism Authority is now engaged in a programme, which allows them to be able actually make business happen, to transact business, or create inventory. Remember in the past that the Barbados Tourism Authority did not have rooms to trade, services to trade or attractions to trade on. What they are simply doing, through their own e-commerce platform is creating a link between them and the providers of the product on Barbados, or even moving further ahead to create inventory through those product providers to be able to deliver to a potential customer or to a customer.

The issues of whether or not you believe that you could just simply have a man living somewhere in some place that has a room and he puts it on the Internet, again, is not to understand the real issues that, for example, a productive society through tourism can deliver through an e-commerce platform.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is really going to happen in the future is the concept of...Sir, eliminating the middle man, as he said, is not as easy as that, Sir. The issue is that Barbados' business, particularly tourism business, is done primarily through tour operators. The reason is that they can package different services and different product bases in the industry, they are able to do it in a more cost effective manner, because economies of scale actually 'kick in' and that is what a tour operator sells.

Therefore, it is not just simply to think that if a man offers a room in Worthing that he immediately eliminates the people with whom we traditionally do business. The

issue must be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in the future, that type of packaging and delivery would be facilitated through a central agency as well, in which they could not only deliver the service but in which they could actually do business with the National Tourism Organisation and not necessarily only through, for example, the product provider. This is really what is important to the development.

We, Sir, live in a society in which this Government is focussed on the future. I say that how we adapt to the dynamics of the emerging technologies, how we prepare our citizens, how we prepare the human capital for that in the future, are really the fundamental efforts of the debate.

Sir, again, I want to congratulate the Minister responsible for bringing us to this point. Clearly, there are issues outlined in the policy, even under the broader objectives. There are some difficulties and problems that we will face, such as, accessibility to information and interconnectivity. How do you really create a platform that connects, not only Government agencies, but the Government and the private sector, to the same central platform? Those are the issues that are emerging and issues that are worth debating. Sir, grandstanding with this nonsense has really given credence to the issue of not only the 'techno-peasantry' but the intellectual bankruptcy that is evident in the Opposition.

Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I give my wholehearted support to this concept. There is going to emerge from this an E-Government Strategy and plan. Again, this is part of the committed interest of the Barbados Labour Party in developing its people.

We have a Manifesto in which this was outlined already. There is no E-Government Strategy in the Manifesto of the Democratic Labour Party but then, again, they do not view it as a contract with the people. I look forward to the plan that will guide the process coming out of this particular plan that has been laid.

I am obliged to you, Sir.

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

Mr. R.L. SEALY: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to speak to the Resolution before the House where Government is seeking to, according to the first line of the Resolution: "Empower its citizens by improving the convenience, speed, efficiency, quality and variety of services and information, delivered by the Government, through the development of an E-Government platform."

I believe we have been told by Honourable Members of the Government that the gist of this thrust towards E-

Government is to see that information and communication technology is embraced in a more meaningful way by the public sector.

I, however, think that there are a couple of things that need to be kept in mind. It is rather ironic that a number of the concerns that the Opposition has raised actually can be found in this very document. It is interesting that a responsible Opposition, that reminds this Government and people of Barbados that in order to have any sensible E-Government platform, there are many pillars the platform needs to sit on.

The Honourable Member for St. Michael South might say that I am being a peasant when I raise that point, because it is not necessarily shrouded in technological language, but the very document that the Government wants us to take note of, speaks to re-engineering business processes in the Government, otherwise the E-Government platform will not work. It speaks to the antiquated processes that exist and the need for those to be modernised, those processes that were established decades ago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it is a fundamental point that was very ably made by our lead spokesperson, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central, and it has been echoed in here, and it remains a deep concern to us in this Opposition that, as we look at going towards an E-Government platform, that the necessary prerequisites are in place. We have a precedent for this and, yes, I am going to have to talk about EduTech.

This very document reminds us, I believe, in the latter section that the key aspect of a successful E-Government strategy is finance. This thing is going to cost a lot of money. Now, some on the Government side may want us to forget the EduTech experience. In fact, we even heard from the Honourable Member for St. Michael South in all of his wisdom, that EduTech did not have anything to do with computers. Now, we remember in the heat of the EduTech debate, we were told it was just a sexy word for fixing the schools. However, we are hearing in the E-Government Strategy that the EduTech project should result in a future generation of Barbadians being technologically 'savvy', and highly skilled.

House 107, Sequence 34, 16:40:14

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Mr. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we are to accept that EduTech has failed to deliver what it set out to deliver and has cost a lot of money, then we want to understand precisely what is the cost involved in this E-Government Strategy and exactly what ultimately Government expects to achieve beyond some lofty goals

that it has put down in a beautiful document. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are the concerns that the Opposition has, but they go further than that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is information technology right now in the public sector, so to what extent are we as taxpayers getting quality for money or value for money with respect to the use of this technology. Some of these things have been raised already but I think it is fair for an Opposition to ask the questions, for example: Has the Town and Country Planning Department improved on the quality of service since they have introduced the widespread use of technology? Has the National Insurance Scheme improved with respect to the provision of services as a result of technology?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when there were some problems with respect to the accessing of pension benefits, we were told that the reason for that was because of information technology, so we need to ask ourselves these questions. In fact, in this very document, we are learning something which I have always heard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may be very familiar with the fact that one of the Government departments that has been using computer technology for some time and using it extensively is the Barbados Drug Service. The Barbados Drug Service enjoys three separate networks and uses technology widely. In fact, they have a number of custom-made software programmes and they will, according to this document, be upgrading the use of technology. Mr. Deputy Speaker, can the average recipients of pharmaceuticals under the Special Benefit Scheme say that they have seen any quantum improvement as a result of the technology? That is the question we have to ask.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government that has been in office for 12 years is saying that they want to take the use of information technology and take it to another level. Sir, we are simply saying, have you assess the use of technology in the existing systems and to what extent are we really getting the value for it and how much would it ultimately cost to go to another level.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, no one is going to argue against the potential that it has, but let us be very clear that it is only a component. I believe very strongly, and I must endorse the point made by the Honourable Member for St. Lucy with respect to the environment that e-government has introduced, because if you have a gap between the rest of the country, and with respect to the public sector, then you have a problem. Therefore, we should really have a series of draft documents, not only on e-government, but we should have one on e-commerce, one on e-democracy and one on the aspects of training in the schools.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Community Technology Programme has been halted because of an unavailability of funds. To my mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that shows a gaping inconsistency at the level of policy because if on the one hand we are being told that this E-Government Strategy is going to propel us to another level as a nation and then on the other hand you are going to tell us with respect to improving the level of IT skills at the community-based that funds cannot be found for that, then I think that we again have a few legitimate questions to ask.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Community Technology Programme was not halted for lack of funds. The Community Technology Programme was under review and it was restructured. The Community Technology Programme has not only restarted, but it has expanded. In the last few weeks two new centres have been opened. The Honourable Minister who spoke earlier has indicated plans for even more centres to come. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was no closure of the Community Technology Programme for lack of funds. It was restructured and expanded and it is 'kicking' again.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Proceed Honourable Member.

Mr. R. L. SEALY: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the contribution from the Honourable Member for Christ Church East who is admitting that they were reviewed and restructured.

Asides.

Mr. R. L. SEALY: So we would have more computers. I sincerely hope that all of us could become beneficiaries because that is the only reasonable approach to take.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if it is that a programme so young has found itself having to be put under review and restructured, perhaps you could look at the idea that the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West posited in here today. I know, and I speak on behalf of all the members of the Opposition and indeed all right-thinking Barbadians, that any initiative which can make the laptops available to every school child in Barbados is worthwhile. I would want to encourage the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West, but then again I do not think that I would have to do this because I know he would think perhaps a little more laterally than those persons who are responsible for EduTech, to remember that you cannot have computer hardware without software.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that apparently was one of the issues that led to the collapsed of the EduTech Programme. There were computers sitting down for over a year waiting

for software, so let us not make the same mistake again. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if it is that the Community Technology Programme perhaps had its difficulties, maybe the idea that was put in here that would enjoy bi-partisan support should be pursued. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no point in Government galloping ahead with respect to its use of technology and leaving the rest of the nation behind. It just would not make any sense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not think that a responsible Opposition that raised these simple points is behaving in any peasant-like manner. That is really very regressive and insulting to say anything of the sort.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a particular aspect of the Resolution that jumps out at me, that is, improving the convenience, speed and the efficiency of information delivered by Government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all know that the Government must have the will to share information. Having the most advanced e-government platform will mean nothing if a Government, far from wanting to share information, finds it at times convenient to hold back information.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had Honourable Members of this Government saying less than flattering things about the call-in programmes. In fact, the head of this Government attacked the call-in programmes. Of course, when Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford was Prime Minister, I do not remember anyone from the Barbados Labour Party having anything negative to say about the call-in programmes but all of a sudden now the whole issue of information and citizen participation in assessing information is a problem.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you see it as a problem at that level, then what is going to happen when the e-government platform is put in place and to what extent would it truly empower citizens. Mr. Deputy Speaker, those are not my words, that is what the Resolution says, that is the purpose of the e-government platform.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to what extent does this Government really want to empower citizens. To what extent does it really believe that information should be made available to citizens. We had an example of a Cabinet Minister that was being interviewed who refused to give reasons for awarding a tender to the highest bidder. He refused to do it and said he had no reason at all for giving the award to the highest bidder. Mercifully, I suppose, the people of Barbados have been relieved of that particular Cabinet Minister when the new Government came into being.

House 107 Sequence 35

4.50 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Mr. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is an example of what I mean, with respect to having the will to share information, and an e-government platform cannot do it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, generally speaking, the whole tendering process and the whole manner in which the taxpayers' dollars are spent, we are not going to see any improvement, as a result of e-government, unless it is improved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, every engineer in Barbados believes that the flyovers are a mistake, yet the Government seems determined...In fact, it is my certain knowledge that even within the Ministry of Public Works, some of the engineers do not support the idea. That is why it has had a hard time in coming to fruition.

Asides.

Mr. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were told that the flyovers were supposed to be installed, to deal with the extra traffic for the Cricket World Cup, 2007. We are now told that the road would be widened and that the flyovers would come after the Cricket World Cup, 2007. Sir, this Government is so determined to see the flyovers become a reality that no information is being shared with the public. It was supposed to be a Build, Operate, Lease, Transfer agreement (BOLT). We are now hearing that the Barbados National Bank will be financing it.

Asides.

Hon. G. A. CLARKE: On a point of order. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House, and the Honourable Member knows it. Sir, I can agree that there are a number of engineers, who are opposed to the flyovers. On the other hand, there are a number of engineers, who are in agreement with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to say that the public has been given all the information about flyovers and that everything is fully above board. Sir, I happen to know that the Honourable Member also supports it.

Asides.

Mr. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is somewhat unfortunate that the engineers, who are opposed to it, are the local engineers and that the ones supporting it, are the ones that stand to benefit from the project. These are the engineers from overseas.

Asides.

Mr. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe the fundamental point is that it is all well and good to have an E-Government platform. It is all well and good to seek to use that platform to empower citizens and to have more information at their disposal. Sir, the fact is that if the will is not there, whether or not you are using a blackboard and chalk or the latest computer, it is not going to make a difference. Sir, I think that is the point this Opposition is simply trying to make.

Mr. Speaker, we have a populace that is going to be wary, naturally because of the EduTech Programme experience. Therefore, in preparing them for the future and in showing them that the way forward is to use more information communication technology. We need to cover all of the basics.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, in this very document, which the Government is asking us to take note of, it talks about the need for a change in the way the Civil Service operates. I am glad to hear from the Minister today that the new Act would be coming to Parliament soon because again all the technology would mean nothing, if there is a Civil Service that has bad morale because of the misunderstandings with respect to recruitment, with respect to promotion, to transfers, working conditions, dismissals or supersession. Therefore, those are fundamental pillars upon which the e-government platform has to be erected. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the point I believe we have been trying to cement in here today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all recognise that Barbados could become more competitive if, for example, the International Business Sector had an arrangement that could incorporate companies online. That would do a lot to improve our competitiveness. We all recognise that the revenue collecting agencies and so on, that require returns to be submitted, on a monthly basis, from businesses and some individuals, would appreciate a paperless system, where these transactions could be electronically done. We are merely saying that while we do that, we have to get a few of our basics together. We have to get them together, and rapidly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, like all Honourable Members of the Opposition, I support the idea of increase use of information technology. We support and find there is the need for that technology but at the same time, this Government, by its own admission, has a lot of work to do, in preparing the way. Sir, as I said, a lot of what I was quoting from came from the Draft document that has been laid before us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few observations, I am much obliged to you.

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not intend to participate in this debate but will do so for a few minutes. Sir, I believe it is critical that there must be some semblance of understanding, that is allowed in this Honourable Chamber and for the benefit of the Honourable Members generally and for the Barbadian citizenry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not disturbed, nor even taken offside any longer, when I heard the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central making wide political statements, that bear no relationship to the truth. Sir, neither do I believe that the Honourable Member has displayed a level of research or analysis that would cause people to want to take what he said as being representative of a position that is worthy of acceptance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Honourable Member had done that, he would not have found himself talking out of both sides of this mouth, both in terms of not understanding the very salient points made by the Honourable Member for St. Michael South, in relation to EduTech, neither would he, at one and the same time, be clasping at the idea put forward by the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West, for laptop computers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the truth is, fortunately we do not have to be guided by his comments, in terms of how this strategy is put together. Therefore, for the avoidance of doubt, as well as for a fuller understanding, it is perhaps critical for me to clarify those aspects of the Government's position again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central knows better because on his own admission today, the Honourable Member has and was a part of the process and would have, therefore, understood from the beginning, that EduTech was fundamentally about a change in how we teach and in what we teach. Furthermore, to the extent that we would want to use tools that were more productive than those that were available to us in our generation, we would seek to do so, through the use of information and communications technology.

Sir, that is the fundamental point because Barbados has reached a stage where how and what we were teaching, were reflected by rote, as opposed to the production of critical thinkers. We then understood that in that context, we needed to use productivity enhancement tools, such as computers and other technological instruments, to be able to allow for greater productivity and also greater interest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West making that point today about the laptop computers. The Honourable Member made the point that when he went to the Inter-American Development Bank seminar, on my behalf, they made the point that one of the things that can hold the

interest, particularly of young boys, is the use of technology because in very many instances, chalk and talk do not necessarily hold people's attention in the same way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us start there, because I believe that the Honourable Member was making a political speech, for political purposes, given his sense of insecurity in St. Michael South Central. Therefore, I empathise with him.

Asides.

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that in his heart of hearts, the Honourable Member knows better. I know the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central would have also sought to educate him about the pedagogical purposes of EduTech, which continue today. I know that the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central would also have sought to educate him about the large numbers of persons, who, even in the absence of a full roll-out of EduTech, have benefited from the system so sufficiently, that they have gone on to do other things in life, that would not have otherwise been available to them. And the Honourable Member nods as I speak.

5.00 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: If you want to treat EduTech as a partisan/political issue, let me know because I would treat it as a partisan/political issues too but, I am not in this debate on e-governance which is too fundamental to the future of this country not just in terms of its external competitiveness but in terms of the internal equity and social justice, that we have a responsibility to bring about, that this is too fundamental....

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also say that the Honourable Member from St. Michael South Central might not appreciate as well that in Government you do not have the luxury of being singly focused on one issue alone, that there are competing issues that demand the expenditure of Government. Sir, in the circumstances of the post-9/11 environment where this Government had to make difficult decisions to defend employment in this country such that we did not see a mass send home and laying-off of persons as we saw in 1991, we, therefore, had to reduce expenditure not only on EduTech but on a whole raft of capital projects. Sir, for two to three years that which we thought we could accomplish prior to 2000 was not capable of being accomplished in the same time frame because of the need to ensure that we would spend money on a wider range of things, particularly in guaranteeing the losses of the tourism establishment on condition that they sent home none of their workers. This came out of a national

economic consultation which took place at Sherbourne in October 2001.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are the facts. I am not going to engage in an idle debate, which is based more on political insecurity than on an appropriate analysis of the facts. I want to say in relation to the substance of the Resolution and the Report which is here that there are a couple of things that I believe ought to be said. Sir, change is difficult whenever it comes and in whatever guise it comes. Barbados' advantage over other countries in the rest of the region has largely been the result of the quality of our public service and a large part of that came from our history of having a larger resident plantocracy here than the other countries in the region. Sir, these are the facts whether we like it or not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what happened is that once you have economic activity taking place beyond the public service, beyond the plantation and beyond the retailers, people have options for employment today that they did not have 40 or 50 years ago. Hence, the quality of persons as well as the number of persons appropriately trained coming into the public service was significantly different because, today, people can choose a whole range of professions from which to engage and in which to train.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things we have to be able to do is to revise and restructure the process of governance particularly within the public service to make it more relevant and more accessible to the people who benefit from it. Sir, take the Royal Barbados Police Force, many of the rules which govern the Royal Barbados Police Force were settled before I was born and before half of us in this Chamber were born. Are they still relevant in today's world? The General Orders of the Public Service; all of these are things this Government has taken on as efforts and projects to be able to revamp. When you are restructuring and revamping rules for departments, you cannot play fast and loose with them. You have to be sure that you understand why they were there in the first place, what is the mischief it was intended to correct and whether what you are putting in place can equally not only be user-friendly but correct the original mischief that may confront or challenge that particular institution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a lengthy process. Sir, if I were allowed to wager a bet, which I am not allowed to do in this Chamber, I would wager to say that it would continue for the next 20 years if we are to reform the processes that have governed the institutions of this country to bring them into the 21st Century because some of them are 19th Century and some of them are 20th Century. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that does not mean that they do not work well for us but in many instances they are cumbersome, bureaucratic and they are not user-friendly. Sir, in many instances, the process of development and the

improvements in technology have rendered many of them obsolete. What we are trying to do with the Government strategy is to be able to obviate the need for some of these processes largely by reason of the immediate interaction.

The Honourable Member for St. James Central in this debate made a good point that another thing which would happen is that persons who currently may be disabled maybe empowered in terms of access to information and benefits as a result of a Government strategy that has a playing field that caters to the skills, needs and abilities of people in a transparent way.

Sir, in a real sense, what has been happening in Government is that because computer and information technology processes have been available now widely for the last five to seven years in particular, that individual Ministries have gone beyond the utilisation of computers for word processing without there necessarily having been an overarching uniform Government strategy and Government policy that binds all Government departments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this strategy that the Honourable Member for St. James North has brought is intended to provide that level of uniformity and that level of coherence which is now lacking from our utilisation of information and communication technology within the Government systems and the public service of Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recognise that there are benefits which would come in relation to improvement in time, the range and depth of access and in relation to efficiency. We are saying that rather than continue where entities have operated in an ad hoc manner, that we should do so in the context of a coherent strategy that recognises that a number of key things have to be put in place.

Sir, what are those things? There must be training. We cannot ask people who have not been trained in the use of equipment to use it and expect that there would do so efficiently so you have to provide the training. Sir, use of computer equipment is not only about word processing or accounting programme but is way beyond that. Secondly, there must be the concern for security. The the Honourable Member for St. James Central spoke to things like the conviction records managed by the Royal Barbados Police Force or other sensitive data. While we may never reach a paperless world completely, the truth is that we have to go towards the storage, first and foremost, of many of these things electronically, even if only to be able to manage the physical resources that we have because we cannot put all the files of the Government in one place. This is why the Archives have a policy relating to what files are stored over what period of time et cetera.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you could store most things electronically, they would last longer. The problem is that a

single storage without back-up is inappropriate and, Sir, back-ups cannot be kept on the same site on which you are storing because if there is a flood or for whatever reason there is a fire, you must be able to have the comfort of knowing that the information is readily available elsewhere and that the records which you have responsibility for taking care of, are in good shape. Sir, it may well be that instead of the Police department having one policy and the Ministry of Commerce another, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade another and the Minister of Finance another, we are saying that there is a need to have uniform standards such that we have certainty as to how data is protected and stored in the Government of Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to training and security, there is also the need for data protection. Once you have data, the reality is that you are going to have to be able to protect the data because much of the data you have may be personal to an individual and, therefore, there may be issues of privacy and other issues we may have to contend within terms of protection. Sir, there is need for the appropriate legislative framework.

H107/17:10 Sequence 37

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: Sir, when I left the Attorney-General's Chamber, there was already a second draft to a Data Protection Bill, which this Government hopes will be brought before this Chamber before the end of the year. It is not just in terms of the E-Government Strategy that is needed but take for instance, a lot of the work done in call centres in Barbados. If we want to get into more of the medical transition business, taking records from overseas that are on tapes, transcription them and sending them back overseas; they want to have the assurance that the Government of Barbados or the corporate entity, would not take those people's records and distribute them in a way that is inappropriate, or contrary to their own legislative standards in the various countries; the same is with financial records.

Sir, the legislative environment within which this whole system functions is going to be the absolute key in order for there to be a coherent E-Government Strategy. The document also speaks to the fact that there must be a champion. Why must there be a champion? As I said in the beginning, change is not easy. If you are going to bring about change, you have to make sure that you could motivate people first and foremost, to accept the need for change. Therefore, that requires people to inspire, cajole, work with and train, to get people to make that paradigm shift, in terms of how they do things in the context of their work.

Sir, we therefore support the elements. This document has been the subject of great consultation, by the various departments and the steering committee had done excellent work. I too would have liked to have seen it two years ago, but the reality is, you are talking about an entity that employs 27 000 people. You are talking about over seventeen ministries, with hundreds of departments. Therefore, if you are going to have a coherent strategy that could be owned by all, the process sometimes takes a little longer than if you were just in charge of a business or, indeed, if you were trying to direct the affairs of the Democratic Labour Party in George Street. Sir, I can understand, therefore, they would feel that it is something that can be done with the snap of a finger, because of the absence of systems and rules that normally inform the environment, within which they function.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also feel that this Government is committed, as we have stated, to ensuring that there is no digital divide in Barbados. Separate and apart from e-government and e-commerce, must be the question of access to information. We live in a knowledge-based society. Many of these things I said from when I was appointed as Minister of Education in 1994. It is more true now than then. More information that is used within this country today is generated from outside than within. It is in that context, we believe that where there are structural issues that prevent persons from having access to that wide raft of information that is available on the internet, that could have the same effect as denying people the opportunity to education.

Sir, I said over and over that the concept of basic free education is what has guaranteed this country's political, social and economic stability. That concept was first defined as basic seventh standard education, up to the middle of the 20th century. It was then defined as primary and secondary, then it was defined as primary, secondary and tertiary education, at the University of the West Indies or at colleges supported by the Government of Barbados, like the Barbados Community College and the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic. Mr. Deputy Speaker, two years ago, this Government also sought to define it, including pre-primary education, because we felt that people had a right to have access to education from as early as three years old.

I am saying that it is my deliberate judgement, that basic access to education must now also have its definition changed again, to include access to information, in a world where there is a preponderance of information available. The caveat which must go and which, once again the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central chose to latch onto as an emblem of his political insecurity, is the whole question of responsibility and causing people to understand that because I read something on the internet, does not mean it is true. There is a responsibility on the

part of this Government to be able to educate persons, such that they bring critical analysis and thought to information which is given to them irrespective of the source of that information, whether it is the Government, internet, blog or newspaper.

Sir, when we go back to the original reason for Edutech, it is, as I said, to allow people to learn to think critically. There is too much information out there now, that if you were to accept everything that you read blindly without question, then a lot of people would get into trouble in today's world. That was the very simple point that I made last week, at the opening of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association regional conference, which seemed to have mushroomed into all kinds of misinterpretations. Sir, I said that there is an absence of an ability to determine whether the comments you are reading are, in fact, the basis of informed comment or not, and that in that context, moreso for the call-in programmes and even the blogs, that you need a framework of accountability that allowed people to have access to researchers and production assistance, such that people could have informed conversation. I went further, if you look at Wednesday's Nation report, written by Mr. Albert Branford, to make the point that in the context of this kind of explosion of information, that framework of accountability, best came from the operators of the stations themselves, since we are a population that resents censorship, because of our historical circumstances throughout the settlement of this country. Those points remain clear and I say that with every right and every access come a responsibility.

Sir, all I am saying is that there must be the framework of accountability and it must go beyond libel and defamation. If people are going to have access to information, then you need to give them the assurance that there is a relative process of informed comment, as opposed to comment that is not rooted in anything. Sir, it has nothing at all to do with censorship and it has nothing to do with preventing people from the opportunity to speak. Sir, I have worked too long in public life to defend the right of freedom of expression, for it to be confused with that concept.

I do understand that our Constitution provides rights that are always circumscribed by the concern of the rights for others. Therefore, there is no absolute individual right to anything under the Constitution of Barbados, but that every right is circumscribed by what is necessary to take care of the rights of everybody else the other one individual who is at the centre of the process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that this strategy is worthy of support and commendation. Sir, I would have liked to have seen the Government do more in a shorter space of time, but this is not the only demand on the

Government's time or expenditure, and to that extent, I believe that we are way ahead of most other developing countries. Are we cutting edge in terms of where other countries are? No, we are not, but we are far ahead of most other developing countries. The task which we face is greater because of the level of complexity of the system of Government, that we already have in place, which is in fact more complex than most other developing as well.

Sir, it is in that context, I rise to give my support to this Resolution and certainly to say that many useful suggestions were made here today, which I believe the Government will do well to take on and to ensure, as we build out the legislative and administrative framework to support an E-Government Strategy, we do so as much as possible as a concurrent manner.

17.20 p.m.

Sequence 38

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

House 107, Sequence 39, 5.20 p.m.

Continuation of: Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY:

...but the reality is that unless we as Barbadians start to develop more content, whether it is for the Internet, whether it is for the television programming, whether it is for magazines, whatever it is, we would find ourselves in a situation where we simply become the purchasers of other people's products and cultures, rather than exploiting that architecture, because that architecture is no different from a plumbing network.

Sir, if at the end of the day, we do not produce the water to move through the plumbing network, produce the content to be used in the context of that architecture, then we would find that there is a form of intellectual colonialism that would be far harder to fight than the previous form of colonialism, under which our governance was based, up until the point of independence.

I make this point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because once again, I repeat, that this is not a population where it will accept censorship or restriction of access to information. Therefore, what is required is to so root our citizens in a sense of who they are, by your national cultural strategy, your national educational strategy, such that in understanding whom they are, they can produce more of the stuff that can, in fact, find its way as the predominant content, which is accessed and used, not just by Barbadians but by other Caribbean people and hopefully other people of similar mind and conviction, across the world.

I trust, therefore, that this strategy will go hand in hand with the continued emphasis on the importance of a strong national cultural strategy, and a strong national educational policy that is rooted in creating productive Barbadians, who are not afraid of taking risks and who are prepared to generate their content to use this architecture, such that it does not become an instrument for the re-colonisation of Barbados, intellectually.

I am obliged to you, Sir.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. James North.

Hon. R.C. EASTMOND: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very unfortunate that particular Honourable Members could have suggested, Sir, that we on this side see technology as the be all and end all. Certainly, while I was here, not one Member from this side, in my presence, suggested that the intensification and heightening of the use of technology would cure every problem or put to rest every ill in this country.

Sir, what I can say is that to his credit, the worthy and Honourable Member for St. Michael North West captured, in a very modest way, the spirit behind what we are doing. He said that this is part of reform. E-Government Strategy is part of the process of reforming systems in the public service. I want to congratulate to congratulate the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West and to tell him that while he is among us, he stands insulated against the vibes and the outpourings from that side, for they can do him no ill, either today or in the foreseeable future.

Asides.

Hon. R.C. EASTMOND: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the context of reforming operations, we always need to be prudent, proactive and conscious of time. Two days after today, the Cabinet of Barbados is going to consider again, as part of the process of reform, two pieces of legislation that have to do with national security, one to do with immigration systems and the other to do with matters of security. Sir, both pieces of legislation are going to enact that data processing of a certain type be actually incorporated in our systems of immigration and security for the future.

If I take it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that these two pieces of proposed legislation will receive Cabinet permission on Thursday to come here, then within a matter of weeks, this Honourable House will have to give its mind to legislation that once again raises the question of the use of electronic methods in day-to-day governance.

Picture a situation, Sir, where in today's world, the National Insurance Scheme still uses old-fashioned manual

systems. Then, the National Insurance would have to employ ten times the staff that it employs now. Picture a situation, Sir, where the Customs Department, the Inland Revenue Department, the PAYE Department, or the Land Tax Department had to rely on old-fashioned manual systems, you would have inefficiency.

In fact, there are Honourable Members here who could tell you that up to about eight or nine years ago, when your Land Tax Bill came to you, the only thing modern on it, was its capacity to allow for the discount. Sir, in terms of the arrears that clients to the Land Tax Department has built up over time, it never reflected the arrears. Therefore, you paid your Land Tax bill in 1996-1997, that time you are in arrears 1980 to 1986 and they had no way to detect that but now, with modernised systems, it is possible to impart information better and in a more efficient way.

One Honourable Member on the other side, Sir, more or less said that this country has a right to freedom of information. I think it was the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central, a man I saw in the north of Barbados two Saturdays ago, and a man who greeted me with such alacrity and love that, clearly, I knew where his support was laying on the day that I saw him in Road View, St. Peter. I knew exactly whom he was supporting, the adulation and affection he showed for me to the limit that a man can manifest affection and adulation, Sir, without going overboard, was such to show where his political biases lie.

Sir, he said that the people of Barbados deserve to have access to information, and he is not wrong. What Honourable Members on this side can say, is that it has been some/time that we have been contemplating a Freedom of Information Act. Sir, in the context where you always have to balance rights, you have to take into account, many variables.

In giving the public access to freedom of information, considerations of national security are never irrelevant. In a context of allowing people freedom of information, you have to take into account, the laws of slander and libel. In fact, Barbados does not bother to distinguish between libel and slander anymore, we call all defommation. In the context of freedom of information, you have to take into account considerations under the Official Secrets Act. When you have to perform a balancing act to take into account the right of the public to information, you also have to consider the duty of the Government to be prudent, when it comes to the transmission and passage of information.

Sir, I was heartened, generally, at the high quality of debate. Sir, having sat there from 1991 to 1994, I am fully

cognizant of how politicians sitting there behave, when there is a hint or suggestion that the bell may ring soon.

Sir, in the context of their political preferences, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central, never at all known to be partisan on the Floor of this House, who normally seem secure, sober and sagacious was actually politically partisan today. It is the season bringing him out, Sir. The Honourable Member for Member for Christ Church East Central, prior to today, has never once in my estimation made a politically prejudice or jaundiced speech.

Sir, what did he do today? He identified all the ills confronting the Civil Service. He spoke about things like supersession. He talked about things like morale, putting them in a political framework and context, to achieve the maximum political advantage, urged on by one who is leading him today, and who might conceivably be leading him in the foreseeable future as well.

Asides.

House 107, Sequence 39, 17:30:11

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: The Honourable Member for St. Lucy may very well be the Leader of the Opposition in the foreseeable future. I am no psychic, but certainly if people like the Honourable Member for St. Philip North has his way, there is nothing at all wrong with the body or the brain or the intellect of the Honourable Member for St. Lucy. Sir, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central put on a particular political cloak today. The theme of his dissertation was that technology cannot be denied its role, but that there is a human element that technology might never embrace. The Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central gave us a litany of the woes in the public service and pointed to something called a culture and a particular miasma inflicted upon the Civil Service. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government proposes, through the modernisation of Civil Service law, to treat to those issues. This aspect of what we are doing as far as governmental operations are concerned is an aspect that is justified but does not go to every problem that there is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we passed the new Public Service Act in the future we will go for systems of efficiency designed to bring about transparency and clean and pure systems of Government. There is going to be a Committee or a Cabinet of Permanent Secretaries who will be empowered in the future to so manage systems in the Civil Service as to eliminate things like political patronage and the victimisation that some people complain of now. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is why I urge Honourable Members to reflect on what the Honourable Member for St.

Michael North West said, that reform is the name and reform is the game. Sir, what we are doing is bringing this as part of the process of reform.

Sir, if reform is a process, it will never be a one-off event, an event which occurs now and it is over with. Sir, a process involves an evolutionary path. E-governance itself has been following a process of evolution not from yesterday. The Data Processing Department was set up in Barbados way back in time from the '70s and we in Barbados always ensure that when we go about to achieve our development we do not do it in a revolutionary way, we do it incrementally, in an evolutionary and painless way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the old people says that "if greedy wait, hot will cool". Mr. Deputy Speaker, this e-governance is designed to ensure the modernisation of particular systems. At the same time we are not oblivious to the fact that there are problems in the Civil Service and we propose to address them. Nobody in this Parliament likes the idea that some people have hammered civil servants as an army of occupation, based on perceptions that some civil servants overdo it when it comes to excessive lunch and sometimes through the perception that some civil servants are not motivated to work. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was not this side that called civil servants an army of occupation.

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: It was not that side of the current epoch, but in historical times, the primary spokesman on that side referred to civil servants as an army of occupation. For us, they are no army of occupation, they are persons with ability and they are persons who need to be motivated and whose energy needs to be harnessed.

Sir, I believe that on reflection the quality of the debate, notwithstanding the involvement of the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, reached a particular level of satisfaction. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy scored some points too, but I must reject with scorn his submission that the sugar industry encountered ills when it turned to mechanisation. Oh Eternal God, you know that even though mechanisation did not cure the ills, were it not for mechanisation, perhaps the industry would have already collapsed not now but decades ago and certainly in the period between 1976 and 1990 when the particular spokesman said they did not want to see a cane blade in this country.

Sir, notwithstanding the fact that the Opposition tried to score some political points, let me thank Honourable Members for bringing to this Honourable House a level of debate that demonstrated that the confidence that particular constituents have put in particular Members is a confidence that is justified. Sir, I will not single out any particular

Member, certainly not on that side, who deserves to be re-elected, but certainly on this side the contributions were of a particular quality and character which I commend to this Honourable House.

In the circumstances, therefore, Sir, I commend this Resolution to this Honourable House and asked that the terms in which it is presented be accepted and that this House take note of Government's intention to press ahead with this matter as a matter of insipient but justified public reform.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those remarks, I beg that this Resolution do now pass.

Hon. K. D. SYMMONDS: I beg to second that.

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

ORDER NO. 9 – SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2006

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to lead this debate and to present amendments in this Chamber that effectively allow this Government to hold faith with a position which we took in 1999 when we brought to this House and saw passed the Small Business Development Act, Cap. 318C in the fervent belief that what was needed to be able to stimulate the small business sector in Barbados was a dedicated legislative and fiscal incentive framework as well as technical assistance in order to be able to ensure that there would continue to be an engine of growth in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only is it commonly accepted that small and medium size enterprises are usually the engines of growth in most economies, the truth is that in our context in the developing world that what we have, has been described elsewhere by Mr. Richard Bernal as Nano Firms, that there are so small that they cannot even be categorised as small when you view them in comparison to other firms within the developed world that are usually categorised as small firms.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we, in the case of the last manifesto that we presented to the public of Barbados, made certain commitments in relation to the small business sector. After passing amendments to our corporate tax and income tax framework, we said that as a result of our stated position that corporation tax would be reduced from the 40 per cent, which it was, to 25 per cent in Barbados. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recognise that when we reached that point in time, given that the reductions were being done on a phased basis year after year, that we would also want to retain the distinction between the corporate tax rate as well

as the tax rate available to the small business sector, which as you know, as the law stands today, is 25 per cent.

House 107 Sequence 40

5.40 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this amendment seeks to allow this Government, therefore, to keep faith with a Manifesto commitment, which was made in 2003, at page 18. That allows us to be able to see a reduction in the corporation tax rate, from 25 per cent to 20 per cent, to be applied to approved small businesses in Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would also recall that the legislative framework, which we introduced in 1999, also gave approved small businesses duty-free access from import duties. It also gave other duties for plant and equipment. We have taken the major step in this legislation, of extending that benefit for duty-free access to beyond plant and equipment. We have extended that benefit to raw materials, where appropriate, except in the case where those raw materials constitute equipment for rental.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, therefore, apart from the benefits that a small business would get from being able to import plant and equipment duty-free, persons would now get the benefit of raw materials, which are critical to that process, once the relevant administrative processes are followed. Persons would be able to import raw materials duty-free, as a result of these amendments, which are before the Honourable House today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, therefore, apart from the significant reduction in the corporate tax rate, from 25 per cent to 20 per cent, the inclusion of raw materials as one of those categories from which you can benefit duty-free access, recalling that you get the benefit of a deduction of as much as 20 per cent of the corporate tax rate, if you could show that you have spent that amount in information technology market research, that is already in the Act. These other amendments that are here today, seek to create a more business-friendly and streamlined approach for the Small Business Sector, so that we could continue to see the expansion of entities that have benefited.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say that it is not to be viewed in isolation from other activities which the Government has undertaken, in relation to the Small Business Sector. For example, in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development, under the Barbados Investment and Development Corporation, persons are entitled to the Special Technical Assistance Programme. A Special

Technical Assistance Programme has, in fact, assisted a large number of small businesses, as defined by the legislation, which are entities with under 25 employees or companies that have paid up capital of between \$1 million and \$2 million. We have assisted to the tune of over \$11.7 million, over the course of the last five years.

Sir, this has nothing to do at all with the tax benefits or with the other funds, which have been designed to benefit persons, such as the Small Hotels Investment Fund; the Tourism Development Fund, which is managed by the Enterprise Growth Fund Limited; the Agricultural Development Fund, which has also helped a number of small businesses; the Enterprise Growth Fund Limited itself, and then, of course, the agencies that were established, that were dedicated to finance small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, for example, since its operation in 1998, FundAccess has helped more than 617 applicants and have led to the creation of more than 732 jobs, to the tune of \$14.2 millions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the \$14.2 million from FundAccess; the \$11.7 from the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC); the funds under the Agricultural Development Fund; the funds under the Industrial and Investment Employment Fund; the funds under the Small Hotels Investment Fund and the funds under the Small Hotel Fund are all combined, along with the favourable tax rates that existed until then, which we are now adjusting to ensure that there is the difference between the current 25 per cent for all corporations and now approved small businesses at 20 per cent, the extension of the duty-free access, persons would see that this Government has done and has put in place a considerable range of policies and funding initiatives, to ensure that small businesses have every opportunity to survive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is because we understand, in a very real way, that small businesses will be responsible for much of the continued job creation in this economy, they will also be responsible for much of the economic activity that we want to take place. Sir, we are doing so, however, cognizant that even with the best will in the world, the very absence of scale in this economy and in greater terms, with respect to the rest of the region and the rest of the world, would put them at a significant disadvantage, unless they are going to find, as their export, creative and unique niche opportunities that do not require volume, in order to give them a competitive advantage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, most of those opportunities revolve around the provision of services, whether in the cultural industries, financial services, medical services, educational services, intellectual property and invariably even in the rest of the global economy. What you see is that

those small businesses that do well, invariably are on the cutting edge of intellectual property, creativity or technology, but that once it becomes the process, which they are associated with or the service becomes popularised, it then becomes owned by a multinational corporation and no longer is controlled by a small business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen this happening the world over because these small businesses do not have the economies of scale, in order to popularise their distributions. Instead, what they do have, is the intellectual capacity or the ability to maximise and leverage that niche, in a way that can bring significant economic benefits to themselves and to the countries in which they participate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, therefore, we are cognizant that many of the initiatives which we are putting in place, have a unique opportunity to give a number of Barbadians, who otherwise would not have a chance to leverage their creativity, their intellectual capacity or their provision of services, in a way that can bring significant benefits to their families and to this country generally, in terms of the overall economic framework of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is in a very real way why we have been working as hard as we have been, in the context of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, along with the various embassies across the world, in the various negotiating theatres, to be able to ensure that what happened to Barbados, in 1994, with the signing on of commitments that effectively curtailed the policy flexibility of Government, in terms of its domestic support for sectors, will not happen to us again, particularly as we participate in the services negotiation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt that other than small businesses providing domestic goods in the context of the local economy, most of the small businesses that would be engaged in export, would, in fact, be engaged in the services area, as opposed to the export of goods.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recognise that a lot of people rely on small businesses, to be able to send their children to school, to pay their bills and to be able to keep themselves afloat. We feel that you could only become a medium-size business, if you have the right encouragement as a small business, as well as the right entrepreneurial leadership. We also feel that, in many instances access to training, access to technical assistance...

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a very simple point. We can reason about it and resolve that this is the way forward but it does not happen that easily. If you have a particular skill and you are forced to go and do other things that you are not skilled in, for example, marketing or accounts, it would mean that you are being taken away from enhancing your productivity and producing what you would be good

at but at the same time, you would be doing a bad job, doing something in which you would have had no proper training.

Therefore, we feel that to the extent that we can provide common services, such as accounting, marketing, et cetera, so that craftsman, businessman or service provider, can concentrate on expanding his revenue base, by doing that which he is good at, that it is critical that we put that support and nurturing infrastructure in place, to allow persons to be able to do so.

5.50 p.m.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also feel that we have reached a point where the nation must understand that Barbados must produce more of what it uses rather than simply be the importer of what we use. Sir, it is in that context that we feel there are a number of opportunities for small businesses and that they must have the opportunity to participate fairly. This is why we have established, almost at the same time that we passed this legislation in 1999, the Fair Trading Commission with a mandate which goes wider than simply utilities regulations but encompasses the Administration and Competition Act and also administers issues relating to consumer complaints.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the reasons we did that, is that we were cognizant of how easy it is for persons to face negative competition from larger enterprises who simply do not want them to be able to succeed in terms of a part area. Therefore, we have ensured that there is a legislative framework that allows for that fairness of competition. Indeed, at the regional level, the Heads have taken decision that would see the establishment of a Regional Competition Commission which would do the same thing regionally in the context of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy as the Fair Trading Commission does in the context of the Barbadian economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not going to detain this House any longer today. The substantive Minister will give a full presentation when the matter reaches the Other Place but it is critical for us to be able to ensure that the background information is available to this Chamber as we seek to consider the amendments before us. Suffice it to say, the small business sector continues to be pivotal in our view in terms of the economic growth and development of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make one more point before I wrap up. We have a way of saying that Barbadians are not entrepreneurs but I do not accept that. I believe that Barbadian are very entrepreneurial because every time we

pass and see a woman selling chicken on Thursday, Friday or Saturday night, pudding and souse on a weekend, a fellow selling ackees on the side of the road or coconuts, that is a sign of entrepreneurial activity. Sir, what has happened is that we need to be able to get people to have the confidence of being able to move into other areas of commerce or other areas of production beyond that which lies within their immediate comfort zone in terms of their home and community. Mr. Deputy Speaker, to that extent, I believe that a significant analysis of why Government has had to put so many different funds in place to give a lot of small entrepreneurs access to capital is critical because, in a real sense, the commercial banking sector in Barbados has played that role in terms of the supporting and nurturing of a small business sector that at the end of the day requires a greater understanding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government, in recognition of the fact that there needs to be a different culture supporting all of that, would have brought new insolvency legislation to this Chamber six years ago, which sought to remove the stigma that previously associated itself with the old bankruptcy legislation. Sir, under the old bankruptcy legislation, if a business fails, the general comment in the society was that you are a failure, a dunce or that you have carried away money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the recognition of the number of business failures that take place on average across the world, shows that business failure maybe completely unrelated to the particular skills of the particular businessman. Therefore, the new insolvency legislation which we have in Barbados seeks to remove a lot of the stigma which would have previously caused the person to think twice before going into business again if they were part and parcel of a business failure.

Mr. Speaker, we are trying to reposition people's sense of confidence. I believe that Barbadians have an entrepreneurial inclination but I believe that the confidence to move outside their comfort zone, to move outside those things for which they feel they could have a ready and easy market like selling in their village, like selling ackees at the side of the road, need to be there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am also confident that the Government has played a role in the early part of the 21st Century because of the lack of responsiveness of the traditional financial institutions in being able to finance ideas that exist. I feel that these amendments before this House are worthy of our support. Generally, to create a more user-friendly environment, they require persons to also show evidence that they have either paid their taxes or that they have satisfactory arrangements with the various tax authorities if they are in arrears. This is a significant departure from where they have been denied benefits as in other areas because of monies owed to the revenue

departments. This year Government said that it would still help, that it recognises that in some instances there were cash flow difficulties, that you owe the revenue, that you cannot ignore the fact that you owe the revenue departments, that satisfactory arrangements should be made with the revenue departments as to how the arrears would be liquidated and then Government would still be able to help throughout the ranges of incentives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this legislation also makes it clear that you have to benefit from one set of incentives or another so you cannot go incentive gathering. In other words, if you are a small business in tourism, you cannot come here, then under the Tourism Development Act and then go elsewhere. We are saying that there are a significant set of incentives here and that if you want to come under Small Business Development Act, these are the incentives. If you want to go under legislation for other incentives you have the right to do so but you cannot seek to gather and add up all the incentives such that you end up incurring no cost at all in the provision of the service in which you are involved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the significant amendment in here is keeping faith with our 2003 Manifesto commitment that once the Corporation Tax rate reaches 25 per cent, which was previously the rate of the small sector, as is in law now, that we would reduce the Corporation Tax rate for small businesses to the 20 per cent now contained in these legislative amendments, that in addition to a 20 per cent tax rate now for small businesses, a significant reduction of 25 per cent in what they would otherwise pay and that you would also have the benefit of being able to import raw materials duty-free as opposed to only Plant and Equipment, which was a capital investment before but the raw materials would now go to the competitiveness in terms of your actual production cost on an ongoing basis.

Mr. President, we believe this would have a significant impact particularly on those small businesses which are involved in processes which require a significant utilisation of raw materials to produce the products that they are involved in. We have seen some 55 companies in Barbados benefited under this legislation since its establishment in 1999, and it our fervent hope and desire that we would continue to see these number doubled and trebled especially in the context of this more user-friendly environment that these legislative amendments bring and, indeed, the reduction in the Corporation Tax from 25 per cent to 20 per cent and other extensions in terms of duty-free access.

I beg to move that his Bill be now read a second time.

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

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that further consideration of this Bill be deferred.

The question that this Bill be deferred for further consideration was put and resolved in the affirmation without division.

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this brings us to the end of today's business. Sir, next Tuesday is, in truth and fact, Emancipation Day, and while I will not require Honourable Members to meet on the date of which we celebrate the Emancipation of our people, however, if we are to meet the deadline in relation to the summer recess without having members in here until the end of August, it means that we would have to meet on Wednesday, August 2, 2006 at 10'clock in the morning.

H107/18:00

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Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Hon. Miss M.A. MOTTLEY: ..without having Honourable Members in here until the end of August. It is therefore going to mean that we will have to meet on Wednesday, August 2, 2006, at 10.00 a.m. We will be recommencing the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill on that occasion. Then between the next Sitting and the one after we will finish this one, Small Business Development (Amendment) Bill legislation. So we will start with the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, which is a fairly significant set of amendments.

I beg to move that this House be now adjourned until Wednesday, August 2, 2006, at 10.00 a.m.

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

The question that the House be adjourned until August 2, 2006 at 10.00 a.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER adjourned the House accordingly.

18.00 p.m.

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SPEAKERS IN THIS ISSUE

CLARKE, Hon. G. A.
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FARLEY, Hon. R. R.
JONES, Mr. R.D.
KELLMAN, Mr. D. St.E.
LYNCH, Hon. N.A.
MASCOLL, Hon. C. A.
MILLER, Hon. Dame BILLIE
MOTTLEY, Hon. Miss M.A.
PRESCOD, Mr. T.A.
SEALY, Mr. R. L.
SYMMONDS, Hon. K.D.

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EDITORIAL NOTES — NOT PART OF THE REPORT

Prepared with the transcript; for checking against the recording and the Minutes.

EDITORIAL QUERIES

Points noted while preparing this report from the edited transcript. The text has not been altered except where stated.

Q1. Masthead. The session is not stated in the source, so no session line is printed.

Q2. Order No. 11, Hon. R. C. Eastmond's reply. The source file carries two reporters' copies of the same passage, from the end of Hon. Miss M. A. Mottley's speech to the first part of Hon. R. C. Eastmond's reply (take-slip House 107, Sequence 39, about 5.20–5.30 p.m.). The first copy is printed here and the second (about 1,350 words) has been left out. Please confirm.

Q3. Minutes. Mr. Speaker's confirmation of the Minutes ('MR. SPEAKER: If there are no corrections or observations, then let these Minutes stand confirmed.') is run into Hon. Dame Billie Miller's seconding in the source. Printed as in the source.

Q4. Order No. 9, deferral. The closing procedural sentence reads 'resolved in the affirmation without division', presumably 'affirmative'. Printed as in the source.

Q5. Order No. 9, deferral. Hon. Miss M. A. Mottley addresses 'Mr. Speaker' when moving the deferral, although the Deputy Speaker was in the Chair and is addressed throughout the rest of the debate. Printed as in the source.

DEBATE SUMMARY

(Editorial summary — not part of the record.)

The House of Assembly met on Tuesday, 25th July, 2006 at 10.15 a.m., with Mr. Speaker, His Honour I. A. Roett, in the Chair; prayers were taken by Reverend Canon Ivan Harewood. The Minutes of 11th July were confirmed. Mr. Speaker reported receipt of the Accountant General's accounts for February 2006 and special audit reports on the Urban Development Commission and the Rural Development Commission. Hon. Miss M. A. Mottley laid the Duties, Taxes, and Other Payments (Exemption) (Barbados National Oil Company Limited) Order, 2006 and the Customs Tariff (Amendment) (No. 2) Order, 2006, and Hon. R. C. Eastmond laid the Draft E-Government Strategy and the Shipping Incentives (Dreams Investments Limited) Order, 2006. The Small Business Development (Amendment) Bill, the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill and the Final Appropriation (2005-2006) Bill were read a first

time, and Standing Orders were suspended for the rest of the Sitting.

Hon. R. C. Eastmond, as Minister of the Civil Service, moved Order No. 11, the Resolution to take note of the Draft E-Government Strategy. He defined E-Government as the use by Government of information and communication technology to extend and enhance its delivery of information and services to citizens, businesses and employees, and set it within the wider programme of public sector reform, promising better services, greater productivity and greater transparency. For the Opposition, Mr. R. D. Jones argued that the term was a misnomer, since governance depended on the work, attitudes and skills of people rather than on technology, and asked the Minister for answers on how the strategy would work in departments such as Customs.

Hon. K. D. Symmonds called it perhaps the first such debate in a Caribbean Parliament; on a point of order from Mr. D. St.E. Kellman he withdrew the words 'derelict and decrepit'. Hon. T. A. Prescod described the Ministry of Social Transformation's Community Technology Programme and its links with the EduTech Programme. Hon. R. R. Farley cited a 2004 survey by the National Council for Science and Technology finding that about 57 per cent of people used computers, some 90 per cent of whom used the Internet. Mr. Kellman argued that E-Government required an expansion of e-commerce and asked whether it would mean sending home 10 000 civil servants. Hon. C. A. Mascoll described a programme by Professor Nicholas Negroponte offering laptops for under US\$200 and suggested making them available to 20 000 Barbadian schoolchildren for under BDS\$400.

Hon. N. A. Lynch spoke on the use of technology in tourism amid repeated points of order from Mr. Kellman that he was misleading the House on mechanisation in the sugar industry. Mr. R. L. Sealy asked what the strategy would cost, given what he said about EduTech, and drew points of order from Hon. R. R. Farley on the Community Technology Programme and Hon. G. A. Clarke on the flyovers. Hon. Miss M. A. Mottley said a second draft of a Data Protection Bill existed and urged that Barbadians develop more content. In reply, Hon. R. C. Eastmond said Cabinet would consider two pieces of legislation on immigration and security systems, rejected Mr. Kellman's view of mechanisation, and the Resolution, seconded by Hon. K. D. Symmonds, was agreed to.

On Order No. 9, Hon. Miss M. A. Mottley moved the second reading of the Small Business Development (Amendment) Bill, 2006. She said it kept a 2003 Manifesto commitment to reduce the corporation tax rate for approved

small businesses from 25 per cent to 20 per cent, and extended duty-free access beyond plant and equipment to raw materials. She cited FundAccess as having helped more than 617 applicants and created more than 732 jobs since 1998, and said some 55 companies had benefited under the Act since 1999. The motion was seconded by Hon. R. R. Farley and further consideration of the Bill was then deferred.

Hon. Miss M. A. Mottley explained that the House would not meet on Emancipation Day, and that the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill would be taken at the next Sitting. The House was adjourned until Wednesday, 2nd August, 2006 at 10.00 a.m.