
THE

House of Assembly Debates

(UNOFFICIAL REPORT)

PARLIAMENT 2008 – 2013

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

met at 10.15 a.m. on Tuesday, February 26, 2008.

PRESENT

His Honour M. A. CARRINGTON, B.A., LL.B.
(Speaker)
His Honour K. St.C. BEST, LL.B. (Hons.), L.E.C.
(Deputy Speaker)
Rt. Hon. O.S. ARTHUR M.Sc. (Econ.)
Mr. G. W. PAYNE, Q. C.
Mr. R. C. EASTMOND, J.P., LL.M.(Leic.), LL.B.
(Hons.) B.A. (Hons.), Dip.Ed.
Mr. G. A. CLARKE, J.P., B.Sc., Dip. Ed., J.P.
Mr. R. St.C TOPPIN, LL.B. (Hons.)
Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN
Miss C. Y. FORDE, J.P., L.C.P. Hon. R. D. JONES,
J.P., M.A. (Ed.), B. A. (Hons.) (Minister of Education and
Human Resource Development) (Leader of the House)
Dr. the Hon. D. C. ESTWICK, M.B.B.S., B.Sc.
(Minister of Health, National Insurance and Social
Security)
Hon. D. D. MARSHALL, Q.C., LL.B (Hons.),
L.E.C.
Hon. M. A. LASHLEY, LL.B. (Hons.)
(Minister of Housing and Lands)
Dr. W. F. DUGUID, J.P., B.D.S. (Comm.), F.D.S.,
FDRCS.
Hon. R. L. SEALY, M.B.A., B.Sc.
(Minister of Tourism)
Hon. F. J. STUART, B.A., LL.M.
(Attorney-General and Minister of Home Affairs)
Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE, M.Sc. (C)Eng.)
(Minister of Transport, Works and International
Transport)
Hon. E. G. HUTSON, F.C.C.A., C.A.
(Minister of Trade, Industry and Commerce)
Hon. S. D. BLACKETT

(Minister of Community Development and Culture)
Mr. J. D. PAUL, B.Sc.
Dr. the Hon. D.S. LOWE, M.Ed., B.A., Ed.D.,
Dip. Theology
(Minister of Social Care, Constituency
Empowerment and Urban Development)
Mr. A. D. BRATHWAITE, LL.B. (Hons.)
Mr. S. A. LASHLEY, B.Sc., LL.B. (Hons.), L.E.C.
(Chairman of Committees)
Hon. P. M. T. TODD, B.Sc.
(Minister of State, Ministry of Social Care,
Constituency Empowerment and Urban Development)
Hon. D. O=N. INNIS, M.B.A., B.Sc.
(Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Foreign Trade and International Business)
Dr. the Hon. E. R. BYER-SUCKOO, M.B.B.S.
(Minister of Family, Youth Affairs, Sports and the
Environment)
*Prayers were taken by Reverend Canon Ivan
Harewood.*

Mr. SPEAKER: This House is now in Session.

MINUTES

Mr. SPEAKER: The Minutes of Tuesday, March 17,
2008.

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, it is my
understanding that the Minutes were circulated, and subject
to any observations or corrections, I beg to move that these
Minutes be confirmed.

Hon. R. D. JONES: I beg to second that, Sir.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY HIS HONOUR THE SPEAKER

Mr. SPEAKER: I am in receipt of the Financial Statements from the Accountant-General for the months of July and August, 2007.

Honourable Members, before we proceed, let me acknowledge the presence of Senator Miss Sabina A. Williams, from the Commonwealth of Dominica, who is here on business and has decided to spend some time with us today. We welcome you.

I also take this opportunity to welcome back my

good friend and brother, the Honourable Member for St. James North. We wish you well, Sir.

PAPERS

Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to lay the following:

1. Representation of the People (Expenses) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2008.
2. Annual Report of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation for the year 2006.

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Dr. the Hon. D. C. Estwick, Acting Minister of Finance, Economic Affairs and Energy, I am commanded to lay the following:

1. Duties, Taxes and Other Payments (Exemptions) (Gymnasium Limited) Order, 2007.
2. Annual Report of the National Productivity Council, for the period April 01, 2006 to March, 31, 2007.

Hon. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to lay the following:

1. Annual Reports and Financial Statements of Needham's Point Holdings Limited for the Financial Years ended December 31, 2005 and December 31, 2006.
2. Annual Reports and Financial Statements of Needham's Point Development Inc., for the Financial Years ended December 31, 2005 and December 31, 2006.

FIRST READING OF BILLS

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the First Reading of the following Bills:

1. Nurses Bill, 2008.
2. Barbados Water Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2008.

Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second that, Sir.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Hon. R. D. JONES: 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. F. J. STUART: I beg to second that, Sir.

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

10.20 a.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 3 – RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE GRANT OF A LEASE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 5 OF THE CROWN LANDS (VESTING AND DISPOSAL) ACT, CAP. 225 TO BARBADOS CONFERENCE SERVICES LIMITED OF A PARCEL OF CROWN LAND TOGETHER – WITH THE BUILDING THEREON, KNOWN AS SHERBOURNE CONFERENCE CENTRE SITUATE AT TWO MILE HILL – IN THE PARISH OF ST. MICHAEL.

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

Hon. M. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, the Resolution before this Honourable House seeks permission for the granting of a lease of a parcel of Crown land measuring 27 769 square metres, together with the building thereon known as the Sherbourne Conference Centre, situate at Two Mile Hill, St. Michael to Barbados Conference Centre Limited, on the following terms and conditions.

Mr. Speaker: (1) The term of the lease shall be for a period of 25 years with an option to renew for a further 25 years.

(2) The rent should be at the rate of \$100 per annum and shall be subject to review every five years.

(3) The lessee shall be responsible for the building and other property maintenance;

(4) The lessee shall be responsible for all outgoings including rates and taxes with the exception of property insurance.

(5) The lessee shall provide and maintain in effect occupiers liability insurance and any other insurance coverage as reasonably required by the lessor with the exception of property insurance.

(6) The lessor shall provide and maintain in effect property insurance with limits not less than 100 percent of the full replacement cost of the property.

(7) No development is to be carried out without the expressed permission of the landlord.

Mr. Speaker, I must state that the then Cabinet at the time, at its meeting on November 15, 2007, agreed to those terms and conditions as explained in the lease. I must also state that Barbados Conference Services Limited was established on April 1, 1998, as a limited liability company and was established under the Companies Act of Barbados with the Government of Barbados as the sole shareholder. Sir, it is the parent company of Sherbourne Conference Services Limited and Horizon Event Planners, which is a full service event and planning and destination management company and Horizon Coach Lines, which is primarily responsible for providing all the transportation and other ground handling services to sister company, Sherbourne Conference Centre Limited and Horizon Event Planner.

Mr. Speaker, the relevant Survey Plan No. 104387, certified by G. L. Jenkins, Land Surveyor on September 10, 1987, recorded in the Lands and Survey Department on October 22, 1987, is attached to the Paper for inspection by Honourable Members.

Sir, Section 5, Subsection 1c of the Crown Lands Vesting and Disposal Act, Cap. 225, gives the Minister the authority and that section states that 'the Minister may, with the approval of Parliament, sell, lease, exchange, grant, assign or surrender any such land vested in the Crown.' This Resolution was certified by the Attorney-General to be in order to be submitted for approval of this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, I must also state to this Honourable Chamber that the Sherbourne Centre will remain the property of the Crown, and that the Ministry of Housing and Lands would be able to ensure that insurance premiums are paid up as outlined in the lease. I must also further state that the Ministry of Housing and Lands would be able to monitor the upkeep of the property through property inspections as agreed to in the lease.

Further, Mr. Speaker, this Administration is committed to the completion of Sherbourne Centre.

Mr. Speaker, we know that this Centre was criticised by the then Opposition at the time. It was called a "white

elephant". It was said that it was a waste of taxpayers' money but, Mr. Speaker, in the fullness of time, we have now realised the benefits, the vision and the foresight of the person who conceptualised this Centre. Sir, over the years, Sherbourne Conference Centre has been the venue for a number of events, cultural events, religious events, and it has been a venue for conferences.

Mr. Speaker, I also respectfully submit that this building was conceptualised by the then Prime Minister, who is now Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, as I have said before, who had the vision and the foresight, despite the criticism laid by the Opposition at that time.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to announce to this Chamber and to the nation that Cabinet has met and is proposing to the Board that Sherbourne Conference Centre be renamed "The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre." Sir, this is in true recognition of an outstanding son of the soil and a person who gave yeoman service to this country and, so, it gives me tremendous pleasure to make this announcement.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, the Resolution is in order and attached is the Survey Plan.

Sir, with these remarks, I beg that this Resolution do now pass.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: I beg to second that, Sir.

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

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, I am indeed grateful for this opportunity to speak briefly on this particular lease. As you are well aware, leases are well-accepted documents which give effect to ownership of a particular property for a period of time and the owner can give a lease for a short period of time or a long period of time. In this case, the lease is for 25 years to the Conference Services Limited with an option to renew for a further 25 years. The Cabinet of the day felt that to lease this particular property to the Barbados Conference Services Limited, approximately six acres of land would also help to ensure that the business of providing conference services would be ongoing, and that they would not have to renew for 25 years. I believe that the Government of the day was wise insofar as it agreed that the lease should have been only for \$100 a year.

10.30 a.m.

Sequence 3

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Mr. G. A. CLARKE: Sir, \$100 per year is very nominal, peppercorn. We believe it is Government's property, a Government company, doing the business of Government, a very profitable company.

I am also grateful to the Government and will support the renaming of the Centre, to the "Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference Services." Sir Lloyd is indeed, a good Barbadian, a former Prime Minister, a former Honourable Member of this House, and a good man.

Sir, This Side recognised the worth of Sir Lloyd a few years ago, and played our part. That is one of the reasons for recognising him as a great Barbadian. We, on This Side do not believe that these are partisan matters, but should be united in activities that are beneficial, not only for ourselves as politicians, but for the wider Barbados and society.

I am also congratulating the Government and the Minister for bringing this particular piece of Resolution.

There are a number of other leases which the Minister is aware of, and I hope that the Minister would endeavour to bring them to Parliament, in very short order. I can speak of leases in the St. George area, the Glebe, where there are about five small businesses, people who need a lease to provide and start to do their business. I know that these leases can take a long time within the Ministry of Housing. It has nothing to do with the Minister. The Government will discover that the technocrats, in that Ministry can hold up the business not only of Government, but of people and businesses across the country. Therefore, it is important that these leases are presented on a timely manner.

Sir, as I said in my opening remarks, a long lease is a legal document which an entity can take to the bank for funds to carry on their business. They can also hire staff, but without the lease they cannot do anything.

Sir, I also want to remind the Minister that both Parties are committed to providing long leases for persons to access and for home ownership. I see no reason why we cannot prepare a long lease for a period of 15 years, the same method that is used for the length of a mortgage. I know that in some established democracies, especially the United Kingdom, where there are long leases for home ownership, where persons can accept these leases, along with mortgages to provide for homes, rather than spending large sums of money, up front, to purchase the land. I believe that these leases can be accepted in principle today by the lending institutions. I would hope and urge the Minister to move swiftly in that direction, as it is a method we started, that should be carried through to its conclusion.

Sir, on a recent tour, the Minister made me, a number of assurances, and I know his enthusiastic manner in delivering these things will go far.

Asides.

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: Sir, it shows that we on This Side not only acquired in the north, but also in the south and across Barbados.

Sir, the Minister in his opening remarks, made the point that a lot of work still has to be done to the Sherbourne Conference Centre. I believe it is fair to say, that when the Sherbourne Conference Centre was originally set up, there was no specific use for its purpose. It was supposed to be an examination centre. It was to be the home for many things. Therefore, when we took over as Government, we looked at how we could utilise it, and it was well utilised over the last 14 years. Therefore, I believe that the Government has seen the wisdom and will continue to utilise it.

Sir, there is still a lot of land to be utilised. I believe there is still a lot of work to be done, in terms of providing not only parking for the facility, because we recognise that whenever there is a big event at the now Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre, vehicles spill into the road, right up to the Bussa statue. It is wise to say that a lot of work must still be done, not only to that corridor of Highway 5, from the Bussa roundabout to the Prime Minister's residence, but to Pine Road. A lot of work still has to be done, in terms of providing meaningful parking facilities for this Conference Centre.

I believe that the Government owns a lot of land, at the back of Sherbourne, which is not part of the six acres here. I would want to see major work in that area.

I also want to say that in the area of St. Barnabas, which is owned by the Crown, there is some squatting, which the Ministry needs to address. I make this point, because we need to address this carefully. We are aware that throughout Barbados, squatting seems to be a new "in thing", which needs to be addressed very quickly. When not addressed, there is difficulty in removing people from the land.

Sir, as the Minister will also find out, even though it is Crown lands, squatters have no legal status. I have pointed out this to many in Barbados, that the Crown is the only entity that is not time-barred. The Crown can remove you at any time. It is different if you are squatting on an individual's land. When these people think they have status, they really have no status at all. It might be better for the Ministry of Housing and Lands to move them early, while informing them that they have no status on land owned by the Crown. Sir, I believe that the Government

should find accommodation for those persons who are willfully squatting.

Sir, the Government bragged that they are providing 500 house spots across Barbados for people in a 100 days. I want to see those with no status given some house spots as well.

Asides.

Mr. G.A. CLARKE: Sir, I want to support this Resolution, and I am also saying that the Minister should now bring other leases, not only on constituent matters, but to a number of other entities, like sporting entities. There are a number of sporting organisations across Barbados that has asked for long leases.

For example, I do not know if Northern Stars have a lease. I know they have been on Crown lands for a long time. I am not sure they have a long lease, even though they have been occupying Crown lands for a long time, but they need to have these leases brought to Parliament.

10.40 a.m.

S4

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House A6, Sequence 05, 10.40 a.m.

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: Sir, I support this Resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, before I recognise the Honourable Member for St. Lucy. Perhaps, now is a good time to note that the Resolution speaks to the lease of lands at Sherbourne, please.

The Honourable Member for St. Lucy.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this lease and to say that it is good to recognise that in less than three months, the Minister has been able to bring this lease before the House.

Sir, listening to the last Honourable Minister, one gets the impression that this lease was long in coming to Parliament and that there are many other leases which should have been before this House, which the previous Minister is aware of, and he is now asking the present Minister, who has been in place for less than three months, to do all the things that he could not do while he was there.

I think it is only fitting, Sir, that the House is told the reason these leases could not have been brought before. Sir,

if the Honourable Member who spoke previously is saying that there is no legal hold-up to these leases, then I believe, that the House should be informed on the reasons these leases were not brought before.

Sir, it is no doubt that the Sherbourne Conference Centre is a landmark and I am happy to hear that it would be named after Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, and that it would be located at Sherbourne, Two Mile Hill, in the parish of St. Michael.

Sir, we have a way of removing history from the books of Barbados and while I am in here, I will try hard to ensure that we do not change the names of places, and when you look back at the history book, you cannot identify the particular location, and it is as if history started from the day the Minister has renamed that particular place.

Sir, as you are aware, there are many places in Barbados that have been given a name change and the history of those places have been destroyed. I will not be party to that, and I am happy that we have recognised that the name 'Sherbourne' as a location, will still remain.

One can easily recall - and not that I am trying to move the Debate, because I will not do a thing like that - that a school, with such great history as St. Clements, one day was taken off the books of Barbados and given the name Ignatius Byer, when it could have easily been the St. Clements School at the Ignatius Byer complex.

Asides.

Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: I beg this House to recognise that we can make name changes without destroying the history of Barbados, because what is even more hurtful, Sir, is that we have a way of recognising lots of things. I am glad that, at least, this Government recognises that the past history of Barbados should be kept, because we were even able to see thousands of Barbadians going and visiting a replica of a ship that brought our fore-parents to Barbados.

I do not know why people have a problem with their past history. Sir, for the simple reason, it is not where you came from, it is where you are going. Mr. Speaker, I have always argued that measurement, in terms of growth, is greater when people know that you started from the bottom and you have gone to the top.

Sir, we have to acknowledge that there is nothing wrong with our history. Nobody should feel ashamed when they walk around and hear others say that they are the off-springs of slaves. They are not part of us. Yet, still, we walk around and talk about them as our brothers.

I want to repeat this point. Sir, there are many persons walking around and talking about having brothers. Sir, when you meet those brothers, the fastest thing they could say to you is that they are not your brothers, because you are a product of a slave and they are not. Sir, we must always remember that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, if we cannot remember that and we do not understand what we are doing, then we do not understand the Bible. Sir, when Jesus Christ was asked who are his brothers and sisters, he was able to make the right reference. If you look at the right dot com., you would understand exactly what I am speaking about, Sir.

One must also recognise, as was said by the Honourable Member for St. George North, that this building was supposed to be for many things. One thing I know, Sir, that when it was conceptualised, it was not supposed to be an office for the Ministry of Tourism. Sir, so great was the idea, that even the Barbados Labour Party recognised the opportunity cost, and was able to find another use for the building.

Sir, it is one thing to criticize, but it is another thing when someone does something, and that thing can be used for many other things. I do not think that the criticism can be fair. Surely, nobody in this Parliament can say that the building has not been used well and once the building has been used well, any criticism is unfair. Sir, if you build a building and it has not been used well, then the criticism is justifiable.

I can think about many other things that Sherbourne could be used for, and I must admit, the Barbados Labour Party was very quick to recognise that it was a good place for offices. Sir, if they are saying that it is good for one Minister, then there is a possibility that some day it would be good for many Ministers, and it should also be used by civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is important? This Government did not stick to the old plan of seeing sea-land as the important land for tourism, but it had the foresight of taking Sherbourne and putting it in the middle of the country to demonstrate the capacity of other land within the country of Barbados. Sir, that was the first usage for it, in helping to develop community tourism in this country, without the other Government recognising the importance of putting a place like Sherbourne in a place like St. Barnabas, where there are many businesses and they did not recognise the spin-off.

Mr. Speaker, many people believe that community tourism is just about music and food. This is not true. Community tourism is about attracting people to an area, and when they find a love for the area, the other services

fall in place and then they develop the area that they fell in love with. Sir, this is exactly what happened at Sherbourne.

Sir, when you go to Sherbourne Centre and you see the highways and everything around Sherbourne, one can now recognise the importance of locating the building in that particular area. Sir, no one in this country could fault this Government for honouring the gentleman who had the foresight to place that building there.

Mr. Speaker, this cannot be a controversial matter in this House, because each one of us has recognised the importance of the building, and have also recognised that even if we wanted to develop inland tourism, that because of the location of Sherbourne, we could use lands around Sherbourne now to put the hotel plant, if we want. Sir, there are many opportunities that have been developed because of this project.

Mr. Speaker, it is rather interesting, because it seems that this name will go down in history. Sir, my history tells me that when this Honourable gentleman conceptualised the Barbados Community College, the same type of criticism came.

House A6, Sequence 05, 10.50 a.m.

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Mr. D. St.E. KELLMAN: Sir, we have seen the Barbados Community College become number one when it comes to the "A" level stage in this country.

Sir, one has to be very careful when one follows blindly, arguments that hold no water. This country is well-known for it. People hear things and before listening, thinking or pondering, they shoot off their mouths and then end up by putting their feet in their mouth.

Sir, this country Barbados needs more Lloyd Erskine Sandifords, because it is persons like him who have the capacity of taking Barbados beyond being a first world country. Procrastination would not take it there. Sir, foresight will. Sir, what is lacking is foresight on many matters.

Mr. Speaker, it is persons like Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford that will get us out of our food problems. It is persons like him who would ensure that companies like these could get a lease like this because they generate the capacity for us to be able to earn other things, so that we could come and lease this.

Mr. Speaker, there is no big thing whether it is \$100 or \$1 million, because you are really moving it from one pocket to the other, so the amount of the lease cannot be an issue. The most important thing is to ensure that this

company recognises that the expenses to it are not great and they have a right to turn around the situation, because nowhere in the world would you be able to lease a property for \$100 a year. No other company would be able to do that. The only other place I know that is so fortunate to get anything close to that is the National Housing Corporation that gets free land.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. George North would laugh now with me, but when the Honourable Member was Minister he wanted to deny it. Sir, because he is on the Opposite Side, he is now acknowledging that what I have been saying all the time is the truth.

Mr. Speaker, I would always be consistent, because in this Parliament there is a document called Hansard that when we reflect we would recognise that consistency is important. Mr. Speaker, now that Hansard has become part of the technological age, we would have to recognise that one could easily go back and look and see what one said previously, and we would be able to mark based on what was said previously and what we are doing now.

Sir, I want to say to politicians to be careful about what they said yesterday, and that if they said something yesterday, and they want to change it today, they need to justify the change, so that someone would not look back and say that they said something else previously, and are now changing their minds.

Mr. Speaker, we also have to recognise that more hotels are now building conference rooms and so on. We also have to recognise that just like many other projects, the demand for the Sherbourne Conference Centre might change at some point in time, depending on the type of hotels we are able to attract to Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to Government that they must put plan B in place to ensure that if it comes to a point where there is no need to use Sherbourne for conferences, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, hotels, instead of paying out, are now going towards the all-inclusive concept where they want everything at base. Sir, I do not necessarily agree, but the same way they have plan B, the Government must also have Plan B to ensure that when the changes come they could utilise the buildings to suit the capacity. Sir, I have no problem with that, because I honestly believe that there are many other things that Sherbourne Conference Centre can be used for.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the former Honourable Member for the City, for having the foresight and for demonstrating the other alternatives that could easily be used for a building like the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the people living around the Sherbourne Conference Centre that they have a golden opportunity to maximise community tourism, and they should. They cannot afford to have the usage at that level and not utilise it. As I said before, community tourism cannot only be about food and music. It has to be about attracting people to do business and also to live in the particular area.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to you and I support this Resolution.

Mr. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Housing and Lands quite rightly pointed out that the Resolution before this Honourable House today, was, in fact, approved by a previous Cabinet of this country. As a Member of that Cabinet in November, I believe that I must be true to the support that I gave to this Resolution back then.

There is no doubt that there was quite a cloud surrounding the development of the Sherbourne Conference Centre. From Our Side, Mr. Speaker, we certainly had the distinct impression that its focus was unknown as many things were being posited, such that it would be the home for the Barbados Youth Orchestra and an examination centre.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy talked about people being consistent with their arguments. We are very well aware that the designs for the Sherbourne Conference Centre were still being done as it was being constructed.

Asides.

Mr. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that Honourable Members on That Side recognise that it is not unusual, so that we would not hear from them any criticisms about any projects that we undertook.

Asides.

Mr. D. D. MARSHALL: The Honourable Member for St. Lucy said that you should be consistent with your arguments, that is all I am saying. We are now hearing that it is not unusual.

Sir, the point is that when this Barbados Labour Party became the Government of this country in 1994, we had a physical asset there, and we felt that as part of the whole idea of governance, we should try to make the best use out of whatever assets are on the ground.

Sir, whatever Sherbourne is today, it is not because a SIDS Conference was held there, it is because the Barbados Labour Party was determined that while the original ideas

might not have been well-thought out, that we would make the most of it, and I think that we have.

Mr. Speaker, it has always been a challenge to attract significant conferences to the Sherbourne Conference Centre. We recognise now that in terms of the facilities on the ground, that there are a number of areas in which they are inadequate. We certainly spent a significant amount of money to try to ensure that it could effectively be used.

Mr. Speaker, one of our challenges in Barbados, the Honourable Member mentioned that and I am happy for that, is the availability of conference space. It is a constant battle especially during the tourist season for us to be able to successfully offer Barbados as a conference location, simply because our hotel plant is completely absorbed, with the regular tourist product and we perhaps have not paid enough attention to conventions as a source of tourism business.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that there is not a Honourable Member on This Side who has not gone to conferences all over the world and have stayed in conference centres that were not on the beach. I have stayed in hotels at conference centres that were really in way-out places.

House A6 Sequence 6

11.00 a.m.

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Mr. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that what we have in that community at Sherbourne, is really a happy coincidence of development. Sir, perhaps it is a little too small, but we now have a vibrant shopping mall in the area. There are other historical attractions that are within easy distance of Sherbourne. Therefore, what we need now is to take a serious look at the viability of putting a conference hotel on that site. This is something that while as a Cabinet, we did not take a decision on. I am able to say it is one of the things that was within our contemplation.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, that it is quite difficult for individuals to be staying at Grand Barbados, the Barbados Hilton or at hotels on the West Coast and to try to make their way across Barbados to Sherbourne Conference Centre for a 9.30 a.m. start, for anything. I am sure you all would have seen, from time to time, the convoys with the police outriders, trying their best to get large numbers of buses filled with conference goers, to make it to Sherbourne for a reasonable start. This is, perhaps, resources that could have been diverted to other purposes. Sir, the time has come where we need to take a step in that direction and look to establish a fairly sizeable hotel on that location, one that would service an expanded and modernised Sherbourne Conference Centre.

I believe there are a lot of business persons who want to pop into Barbados, who want a hotel that is within easy reach of the airport, one that is very near to the highway and that they too will find a hotel at Sherbourne to be attractive. They do not need to go on the coast and pay significantly higher rates, when they could stay in a business-type hotel, with the kinds of ancillary facilities that they would need.

Asides.

Mr. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, I believe that Sherbourne now stands as a facility that can position Barbados. In Jamaica, there is the Law of the Sea Conference Centre that is still today being used for conferences, though it is an old facility. Sir, there is not a modern or available conference centre in Trinidad and therefore if Barbados is able to establish a decent sized conference centre, with a good hotel, we would be able to attract a significant amount of conference business that wants to come to Barbados, because we already have all of the other aspects of the kind of attractions and attractiveness that we need.

Mr. Speaker, the Conference Centre has also become a place of recreation for Barbadians. I have certainly taken my children to the various shows that are there. This shows this is truly a place that can cater to all aspects of Barbadian life and Barbadian needs.

I would like to see that this lease of 25 years, with an option to renew for a further 25 years, could be considered as being a financing opportunity for the Barbados Conference Services Limited. Sir, certainly that was our plan. We saw that the Sherbourne Conference Centre could find resources on the open market, through accessing loans, but that they needed to have the security. The idea that we had behind this lease was to allow them to have the real estate, by way of leasehold in their names, so that they would have an opportunity to approach a lending institution and say that they have the land, they want to borrow the money, and that they are able to service the debt.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things that we could not continue to carry on Government=s books. The Barbados Conference Service Limited is a viable entity. They have been showing profitability over recent years, they have put in place a brand new marketing arm, so as to be able to market the Barbados Conference Centre, both at home and abroad, but the funding to develop the Conference Centre would have had to come from central Government=s budget. Sir, we felt that was not necessary, that it was not a good way to go in today=s environment, and that the Conference Centre services could be competitive and that they would be in a position, once they held the lease, to approach financial institutions and offer the leasehold as security.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that in the same way that the Minister of Housing and Lands has taken this seed that was planted by the Barbados Labour Party, four or five months ago, that they would take the whole tree and allow the Barbados Conference Service Limited to further develop Sherbourne Conference Centre, by using the leasehold interest that they now have as security.

Mr. Speaker, as to the renaming of the centre as 'The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre', it is a hallmark of Barbados and of Barbadians. No matter whatever Administration, we have always sought to recognise Barbadians, who have served this country with distinction. We may not always have agreed to what they did, we may not always have agreed to what they said, and certainly Honourable Members on That Side would not have agreed with all the Honourable gentleman would have said or would have done. Sir, the fact is that we need to recognise our leaders. We need to recognise our Prime Ministers, and we can do that by recognising their contributions through the naming of buildings and locations after them.

I believe the discussion must be tabled at a different time for a more meaningful way of recognising people who served this country with distinction. It would not conveniently fit under this particular Resolution but I think that as a developed country, there are some lessons from which we could learn.

Mr. Speaker, in the United States of America, the library is not just named after a President. There are many things which allowed him to maintain the dignity of the highest office in the land, even though he is no longer there. Therefore, I think the time has come when in Barbados we need to look at our leaders and not just stick their names on the outside of a building. We need to recognise that our Prime Ministers, as long as they are alive, deserve to have, not just recognition in name but we need to ensure they are allowed that recognition in the way in which they live.

Mr. Speaker, I am not asking that anybody should be given a Government House, but I do feel that they are certain things that should be given. Therefore, we need to establish that kind of protocol, so that these persons could be afforded such.

Asides.

Mr. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, we started by knighting the Honourable gentleman and we feel now that the Democratic Labour Party is the Government that perhaps they would seek to flush out the protocol and ensure that Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford is allowed to be more than just a name on a building.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I support this Resolution.

Hon. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the

Resolution and would want to start off by joining with the comments of all Honourable Members, who have spoken before me and to salute the decision to rename the Sherbourne Conference Centre as 'The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre.' It is an appropriate gesture to someone who, in the face of much criticism, persevered in a project that has served us well. I think it is very appropriate when we heard Honourable Members, even on the Other Side, speaking about vision and I think that credit must go to the Honourable Member for the vision he had when he established the centre.

Mr. Speaker, the support has come tongue-in-cheek because I am hearing some suggestions that, in 1994, the then new Government was unaware of what to do with the Sherbourne Conference Centre. They said that it was a music centre, an examination centre, a cultural centre, and that we did not know what we were doing, but clearly, it was a multi-purpose facility. Sir, that term only crept into their lexicon a few years down the road, when they were trying to justify Kensington Oval.

11.10 a.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Hon. R. L. SEALY: I heard the Honourable Member for St. Joseph speak about all the wonderful ideas they had to apply to this piece of real estate, as if some grand retrofitting exercise had occurred when they came into Government but, Sir, the same thing we left, we have come back now and found in 2008.

The only thing they did were a few landscaping ventures and some renovation to the laboratory facilities in the Ministerial Offices, so do not give the impression as if this place was redeveloped totally because of some wonderful idea that the Barbados Labour Party had brought to bear. We are now dealing with trying to put a Strategic Plan in place for the proper use of that facility. Sir, that is the exercise we are now doing and we are doing it now in the beginning of our term.

Mr. Speaker, I came across a Strategic Plan for the Barbados Conference Services Limited dated September 2007, so on their way out of Government they had then come up with a Strategic Plan, but we have now come up with one now at the beginning of our term and, hence the reason for this Resolution.

Sir, in effect, the last Government did agree to the lease, but it is something that could have happened years ago. We are just tidying up a situation that has been occurring.

Sir, Barbados Conference Services Limited has, in fact, been occupying the premises, in effect, leasing the property from the Government for a number of years, so this is really just tidying up at that level.

Mr. Speaker, it is in keeping with our determination that we need to have some vision for the facility. I have heard the Honourable Member for St. Joseph speak about the profitability of Sherbourne Conference Services Limited but I am not sure which annual reports he has been reading but the ones that were laid in here when I was sitting on the Other Side, and for that matter even before do not speak to any profitability.

Sir, we can go back to 1999 when BCSL lost \$1.9 million, even with a Government grant of \$1.6 million, a loss of just over \$300 000. Sir, in the year 2000, the loss was \$1.8 million and the Government grant was \$1 million and it was a loss of \$793 000. Sir, the trend continued upward and in 2002, the loss was \$2.2 million and a Government grant of just over \$1 million meant that the net loss was \$1 million.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 the net loss was \$669 000; in 2004 the net loss was \$236 000, in 2005 \$300 000 and 2006 and 2007 are yet to be laid in the House, but Honourable Members would find losses of over \$1 million in each year. Sir, right now the accumulated deficit of the Barbados Conference Services Limited is \$6.5 million as at the end of the financial year March 31, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, it does not end there. There is a negative working capital that exceeds \$1.3 million. Sir, the accountants would tell you that if you have an accumulated deficit like that, and negative working capital, consistent and constant losses, your expenses exceeding your revenue stream. In essence, you are bankrupt and that is the reality.

Sir, I do not know where the idea came from that this place is so well run over the last 14 years. Sir, far from that, but we are determined to see that we have an appropriate Strategic Plan that will see that this situation is corrected.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing that Honourable Members said that I agreed with is that the Sherbourne Conference Centre has now become synonymous with conferences and meetings in Barbados. Sir, it really stands apart. It is a unique facility. It is a facility that offers quite a lot. It is a facility with tremendous potential, Sir, and we have a Development Plan that not only speaks to completing the centre with respect to the much talked about auditorium, but what is the best use overall.

There are a number of rooms that are highly under-utilised in that facility and we feel that we can come up with a way, if necessary convert some, not all, to office facilities that could be leased out to Government departments or even in the private sector, but we have a wonderful piece of real estate and we need to rationalise it.

Sir, if you take a walk through the Sherbourne Conference Centre, you could see examples where the space is not being used effectively. In fact, one of the reasons why expenses are so high at the Barbados Conference Services Limited is a utility bill that exceeds over \$1 million a year and you could see that it cost quite a bit, because the air-conditioning alone is a substantial cost, but if we could modernise the system and have sections that could be cooled according to the use because it is a central air-conditioning system, we think we could cut that bill down and get on the road to viability.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that I explain to the House that the redevelopment plan for Sherbourne is a total one. It is not just about completing the auditorium. In fact, it is my own view, that we need to look within the context of other developments in Barbados as to whether or not the auditorium, as was originally thought out, is the way to go.

In fact, one of the proposals being looked at by the Board, in consultation with the architects, is whether we can have the conference hall expandable, so may be, if 600 seats are permanent, you could have an additional 600 on a temporary basis, according to the size of the event you are having.

Sir, again lending to a scenario where you have multi-purpose, multi-use, where you even have activities going on simultaneously at different parts of the facility. Sir, these are ideas we are trying to posit as we go forward with respect to the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre.

Mr. Speaker, what is also important is not just to look at the bricks and mortar side of the development in isolation, but you have to look at the organisation that is going to be driving the business for the facility. Sir, to that end, we are looking at reorganising the whole question of the organisational structure of the Barbados Conference Services Limited.

Sir, some aspects of it do not make a lot of sense, quite frankly, and when you have such staggering losses, you have to make sure that you have the most effective use of your human resource base. There are some things that simply do not make sense, Mr. Speaker, and we are addressing those with a view of recognising the overall vision for the multi-purpose facility to be used in every way, form or fashion.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing the necessary staff audits, we are looking at the relationship with suppliers and we are looking at the downstream activities, because you had two entities that were created without any clear business justification. Sir, I speak of Horizon Event Planners and I speak of Horizon Coaches and Tours, the five luxury buses that you see parked out there by the Barbados Conference Centre that are operated by Barbados Conference Services Limited. Horizon Event Planners is the planning division within the Barbados Conference Services Limited group.

Mr. Speaker, I am suggesting that we need to look and see what is the best way we go forward, because another major cost is the wages and salaries, which were steadily increasing under the last Government in the absence of any real, clear, Strategic Plan. You cannot just employ people and employ people without locating them within some larger plan. We are saying that the way forward is to ensure that the taxpayers of this country get the best use of their monies and that the Centre is viable.

11.20 a.m.

Sequence 8

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Hon. R. L. SEALY: Sir, it is not necessarily a private sector entity that has to make money. I accept that it is not only about making a profit, but it is certainly about minimising the losses, even if you are not making a profit. My own view is, eventually it should make a profit, but certainly, until we get there, we can minimise our losses and could at least break even. There is no reason why we could not.

I think the facility is unique enough, I think it has a strong offering to clients. I think the rates charged are sufficiently adequate, that there is no reason why, eventually, it could not make a profit. We would see what is the best use of the downstream activities that are associated with BCSL, specifically, the Coaches and Tours, and the Event Planning Division.

Sir, my own view is, Sherbourne Conference Centre is the core activity of BCSL, and where it should focus. There are a number of young Barbadians, particularly young women, that have gone into the whole idea of event planning as a career. I see no reason why we cannot establish more strategic alliances with these persons, so that they can bring more activities to the Sherbourne Conference Centre. Therefore, it may not make sense in the long run, to have your own Event Planning Division, because you are going to be competing against the very people you want to bring business to you.

Sir, these are the sort of things that we are now looking at, when we talk about an overall Strategic Plan. These are the sort of things that we need to join in, when we speak of the need to get the physical building completed and to re-orient the existing building for maximum utilisation of the whole facility.

Sir, the dependence on Government's subventions, in my view, can become a thing of the past. That is what we must aim for when we look at the facility. It can become a true jewel in our tourism offerings as well. Of course, I have some responsibility for those activities, so I will also speak to that.

The Honourable Member for St. Joseph mentioned one of the drawbacks of the Sherbourne Conference Centre has been the absence of a hotel facility in the vicinity of the Centre. Very often when you travel overseas and attend conferences, you could usually walk from your hotel room to the Conference Centre.

In the case of Sherbourne Conference Centre, of course, you have to get in a bus, taxi or hire a car and drive, often through some very heavy traffic as well, whether you are coming from the West Coast or South Coast. That is a drawback, and whether it can be resolved by constructing a hotel adjacent to the Conference Centre, I am not totally sure, but it is something that is being looked at as a possibility, within the context of our Strategic Plan, keeping in mind that if you do build a conference hotel on that property, it would hardly have more than 150 beds.

For any reasonable sized conference, you still will have to look at moving people into the Two Mile Hill area. Sir, I think that aspect of the development of the facility needs to be looked at carefully. Whether we consider that, the fact of the matter is, the meetings and incentive aspect of tourism, are something for which Barbados has a tremendous amount of potential.

Sir, every single occasion we have hosted a major conference, the comments have been very good. Barbados has a good infrastructure, the telecommunications are strong, and all of those things that we push constantly when we talk about our international business sector, and when we speak about leisure tourism also, these are tourism also. All of those things would apply in getting more meetings and incentive groups, that do come for that type of activity.

Sir, in that context, Sherbourne Conference Centre needs to be marketed more effectively, as a facility that can accommodate world-class type conferences and conventions. The Barbados Tourism Authority is, in fact, looking at that in a very serious way.

Sir, the restructuring that I spoke about extensively, with respect to the Barbados Tourism Authority, will take

into effect that we will have officers, possibly even stationed overseas, in London, the United Kingdom market, where meetings and incentive businesses are so strong, we may have an officer stationed there, trying to get more of this type of business and to pull it in. It is good business to have also, because the average daily spend of someone who comes to that type of activity, it is found, is a bit higher than a leisure tourism person, US\$160 per day. The business aspect from that point of view is important.

Sir, if you look at the last 14 years, there were a number of major conferences that were held at the Sherbourne Conference Centre, and the then Government, of course, with great pride, announced that it was hosting these activities. There was the Caribbean Tourism Conference in 1996. In fact, there was another one in 2000. The ACP, EU Conference, the Honourable Member for Christ Church West would tell you about that. He would have participated in the one of 2006, but a colleague of his Sir Richard Cheltenham, the one in 1998. We have had the ACP, EU, Florida Cruise Association, and they are still talking about that.

Sir, when I was in the Sea Trade Convention last month, Executives from The Florida Caribbean Cruise Association, were speaking about the conference that was held here. The Honourable Member for St. Michael North probably would remember that. He was involved in that activity. We have a jewel here that cannot only service Barbadians, but can earn the much desired foreign exchange, by adding an additional aspect to our tourism product. Sir, I am saying that the work between the Barbados Conference Services Limited and the Barbados Tourism Authority will be aimed at getting more business to Sherbourne, but of course, we have to complete it. Therefore, I thank the Honourable Member for St. Philip North, my good friend, for not having me wait 13 years before he brought the lease to Parliament. Now that there is a leasehold, we can actually speak in terms of what are our financing options. Which market we can go to, to have a viable way forward.

Sir, the Estimates, this year, it was made very clear when we wanted some monies to refurbish the kitchen, so that we could deal with some catering issues. I really do not want to get into that right now, because that is another Debate all together. That catering situation is one that is bulk bearing that we are dealing with. Sir, when we required those funds, the Ministry of Finance made it clear that you will have to go on the market and make a case to a bank or financier, and pay for the kitchen yourself. That seemed eminently reasonable to me, if we want the BCSL to be viable. So, that is the reality.

Sir, we have our long-term plan. We are backing it up with the necessary business plan, and we are working on having our development plan to fit in with what we desire,

because ultimately, we want a facility that we can all be proud of. We want a facility that will have a better rate of utilisation. The room occupancy is very small.

Sir, another aspect of the restructuring of the Barbados Conference Services Limited (BCSL), would be to see the sales component, how business is attracted and how it is driven. That will be given a serious shot in its arm in the Global Convention Bureau Management World. During the periods when you need more business, you adopt a more aggressive style, in terms of price and so on. We also have to look at the value-added aspects of things.

Sir, it is my hope that Sherbourne - The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre - will eventually have its own restaurant operating on a daily basis. The space is there on the lower part, and my own view is, that sometimes people are having smaller activities there and may not necessarily be able to have their own catering taken care of.

11.30 a.m.

Sequence 9

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

House A6, Sequence 10, 11.30 a.m.

Hon. R. L. SEALY: Sir, if it is going to become a hive of activity, and if we are going to have more things occurring there, such as small activities, medium-sized activities and large activities, then there is the capacity for a restaurant facility as well, to see that we can have more activities occurring and, again, a more vibrant centre.

Of course, if we are talking about intentionally having more Government offices there, or potentially going on the market to have private sector entities there, then that too, will be another added attraction to the facility. Mr. Speaker, we are working hard at the Ministry, along with the Board, which I salute for their tremendous work in trying to establish a way forward. They have presented us with many options. We have recognised some of the weaknesses that exist, but we, of course, recognise our strengths.

I believe it is a little unfortunate that we now find ourselves doing this exercise at this point, when clearly, with the global economic situation and the need for a little more fiscal discipline, it will be a little more challenging.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no reason what I just said could not have been said in 1995 and executed then, but for whatever reason, it was thought that anything to do with the Sherbourne Centre was low on the totem pole, so you could not deal with that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, those were the times when we had record levels of taxation. There was a lot of elbow room. The global economy was growing. There were the VAT monies. Sir, it would have been nicer, if we could have been doing the development plan during that period.

However, that is not to say we cannot do it now. I think we have to do it now, because the situation of growing losses cannot continue. The facility is the Premier Conference Centre in this part of the Caribbean, and we have to make sure that it continues to serve the island well, it continues to serve the Region well, and we can do true justice to all those individuals who worked so hard to make the Sherbourne Conference Centre what it is today.

Sir, once again, I salute Sir Lloyd Sandiford for having the vision to persevere with the Centre and I assure this House that we will do all to ensure that the entire country will continue to have that wonderful facility at Two Mile Hill at its disposal, to have many different activities. We can also use it to enhance our tourism product offerings and see that it contributes positively to our tourism and therefore our economy.

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

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

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank you and the Honourable Members for your warm welcome to me on this day. I commence by seeing what we are doing today as the regularisation of affairs. It has become something of a culture in Barbados for the Government and Government agencies to go into possession of other people's lands, and use them for years, without regularising such things like title and occupancy. Sir, this is why this lease is very much in order.

Mr. Speaker, I will limit my comments to just a couple of matters. I think that the statements made by the Honourable Member, who preceded me, should be taken to heart. I take it too, that the time has clearly come when we ought to review all that has transpired at Sherbourne. We need to look at things like ergonomics. We need also to take into account the contribution made by the Honourable Member for St. George North and to ascertain how much other land behind Sherbourne could be put to productive use. Sir, we need to ensure that this particular conference centre becomes the premier conference centre in the West Indies.

Sir, in the Caribbean situation, there are leaders of other countries, who want their countries to be the premier conference arrangers in the Region. We in Barbados have a reputation, not only for our hospitality but increasingly,

organisational skills to facilitate development, which are on the improvement in Barbados. Sir, with some imagination, politics being the art of the possible, we should be able to let the lease now be the facilitator of better things to come.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that there is demand for the services offered by that Conference Centre. There is demand. Sometimes, in the midst of this demand, either the Centre has not responded or sometimes is not aware of where it is. This is a Centre that has been able, at 24 hours' notice, to get conferences organised.

Sir, I remember a particular conference that was set for the Island Inn and it had to be cancelled from that location, and in 24 hours, Sherbourne Conference Centre was able to accommodate that particular activity and did so well.

Sir, one of the features about Sherbourne is that many things can go on in there at the same time and I welcome its use as a facility that facilitates cultural activities. Mr. Speaker, we in Barbados have to do an inventory of what we have available to us, in respect of culture. This is why the Errol Barrow Memorial Centre has become so important, because that is a Centre set up to make sure that the arts and cultural activities are allowed a facility that is important. Sir, at the same time, that does not rule out the possibility of using other facilities in this island for culture.

Sir, I conclude by making a remark that has to go into the record. This spot that we are going to name after Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford means a lot to Sir Lloyd.

In 1969, on that very spot, an institution for which Sir Lloyd had fought, was founded. Sir, I refer to the Barbados Community College. Sir, that spot was the first location for the Barbados Community College, pending the movement of the college to The Eyrie, and Sir Lloyd had fought for a community college on many grounds. I am saying that now we are going to recognise his contribution in respect of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, that we need also to recognise his contribution for having put a Barbados Community College in Barbados and for having put it there. I therefore feel that when the time comes and he reflects on the massive contribution he made, he would really appreciate the fact that we in this Honourable House will, for posterity sake, recognise what that spot has meant to him and what has transpired on that spot today.

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

Thank you, Sir.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for the City.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this matter before the Honourable House, and in so doing, let me first pay tribute to Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford. I was literally born in the Constituency of St. Michael South, which he represented so well over the years.

Indeed, I remember the night of the 1971 General Elections as a young lad at Dalkeith Road, the family gathered around the old radio with the vacuum tubes, listening to the results. The adults in the household, had voted for Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, so that name has been familiar to me from back then.

Sir, even before I knew of the late Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow and others, I knew of Lloyd Erskine Sandiford and his commitment to the poor and the development of our Nation.

House A6, Sequence 10, 11.40 a.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Mr. Speaker, I totally support and align myself with the recognition of his effort in naming the Sherbourne Conference Centre 'The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre.'

Indeed, Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford was adamant that the Sherbourne Conference Centre should be constructed in the face of massive criticisms by the Barbados Labour Party in Opposition at the time who said that Sherbourne would be a white elephant and a waste of taxpayers' money. Sir, when I hear Honourable Members on the Other Side speak so glowingly of the visionary nature of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford in recognising the benefits to be derived by erecting and running a conference centre at Sherbourne, I really believe they need to hang their heads in shame, because they had the temerity to publicly criticise and ridiculed Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford and the Democratic Labour Party for being visionary in terms of looking at the future development of our country, and realising that there was a void in terms of the lack of conference facilities to propel tourism into this new millennium.

Mr. Speaker, when I heard the Honourable Member for St. Joseph talking about certain plans of the last Administration to build conference hotels in that area, I really wonder how seriously they expect the public of Barbados to take that, when the reality is that for the 14 years they were in office they left Sherbourne Conference Centre unfinished with its backside exposed with all the iron rotting away and they did absolutely nothing to complete it. That is why they have been removed from

office and now have to sit on the Opposition Benches. The public has seen the folly of the Barbados Labour Party approach to the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Government for early in its term, focussing on the redevelopment and the completion of Sherbourne Conference Centre. Mr. Speaker, I praise the Lord that commonsense prevailed in the last General Election because, Lord help us, if the Barbados Labour Party had remained in office, the Sherbourne Conference Centre may not have been completed five to 10 years down the road.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford is the person who was adamant that the Barbados dollar would not be devalued. This must be recognised when we write the history books in our country. Mr. Speaker, this man stood up against the Bretton Woods institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and said that we could engage in structural adjustment without devaluation, when they were breathing down our necks saying, devalue. Therefore, I believe that this is a fitting tribute to the man who now has resulted in the Barbados model in terms of that exercise for structural adjustment, being recognised internationally as a viable economic approach to national development and Government policy. Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a man who is recognised internationally for being visionary and resolute in the determination to ensure that small open economies like Barbados, are not in any way diminished to the extent where the vulnerable groups, the working classes, suffered at the hands of international trends. Therefore, it is very fitting that we have this institution for posterity, so that the name of Lloyd Erskine Sandiford would be seen for generations to come, as someone who is a builder, and was a builder of our great country.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the use of Sherbourne Conference Centre, I was never in any doubt about the viability of such a conference facility.

Mr. Speaker, as President of the Guild of Undergraduates at the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies, I was privileged of travelling to Jamaica and right in the heart of downtown Kingstown, the capital of Jamaica, is the Oceana Hotel, no prime beach area, and in the same complex is the Jamaica Conference Centre with several conference rooms. Therefore, I look forward to such being constructed in Barbados. Mr. Speaker, just recently I was at the Coronado Springs Hotel in Orlando, Florida, part of the Disney complex, where the conference I attended housed nearly 3 000 delegates and several other conferences were going on simultaneously in that same hotel complex. Therefore, I believe that this is the way to really propel tourism in Barbados to ensure, in the face of rising oil prices and other pressures upon small open economies such as ours, we could really have a resolute

and vibrant tourist product that could earn foreign exchange to help us withstand the negative impact of these rising prices internationally, so that poor people would not suffer because the country would be earning the foreign exchange through tourism, that would enable us to maintain and improve our standard of living and be able to import the food and other commodities that we have to pay for in foreign currency.

Mr. Speaker, tourism is very vital to the future stability of our country. I congratulate the Government for sticking to the development of conference tourism, so that we could really improve the tourist product.

Mr. Speaker, as other Honourable Members have said, we need not only to build the conference hotel in the immediate environs of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, but we need, as the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central mentioned, to have the room accommodation available on the island in order to attract the hundreds and thousands of persons who would attend international conferences at the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the issue, as other Honourable Members have mentioned, of the congestion in terms of traffic flow, we have to look at the three or five-mile radius around the Sherbourne Conference Centre. Of course, that would include the Bridgetown corridor. Therefore, as Member of Parliament for the City, I am encouraging the Government to ensure that we look at that prime beach front area from Bay Street right down to the Pierhead, and even beyond to Pelican, and see how we can come up with imaginative projects that could see massive hotels being erected, so that those persons would just have to travel no more than a couple of miles to get to the same Sherbourne Conference Centre. We need to really propel that infrastructural development in that prime beach area.

As I understand it, Carlisle Bay is one of the most popular beaches internationally and regionally. Therefore, we must exploit that prime beach front real estate.

Mr. Speaker, I am not in any way suggesting that we have any resultant lack of access to the beaches. In any re-deployment of that Carlisle Bay area, we must have very accessible windows to the sea.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the location of the old BICO Building right next to the Boatyard, that open space there is prime real estate. When you look at the old General Hospital site, including the old Eye Ward and the Child Care Board Building where there was the hospital jetty. There was a proposal a few years ago to build a jetty there, and at the end of the jetty, have a massive restaurant. I know that has had some problems, but I hope that we do not abandon the proper utilisation of that area in terms of

building the necessary infrastructure, be it hotels or what have you.

House A6 Sequence 11

11.50 a.m.

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Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Mr. Speaker, we really need to seriously and aggressively redevelop the Bridgetown area so that, for example, if we were to build a hotel at that site, we would also have to improve the housing in that Nelson Street/Ribetts Land area, so that tourists would not be looking down at poverty or at people bathing in their yards, because of the fact that the last Government would have failed to provide waterborne toilet facilities for those poor persons in Bridgetown.

Asides.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: The last Government focussed on trickle-down economics, where they gave the number of concessions to the rich entities, hoping that a few crumbs would fall down to the poor. Instead, the poor suffered under the 14 years of the Barbados Labour Party Administration.

Asides.

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, in this Honourable Chamber we are observing the principle of relevance. Sir, there is nothing relevant to what we are doing that is being uttered by the Honourable Member at this point.

Asides.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I am relating the issue of the redevelopment of Bridgetown to the need to provide more hotel rooms for Sherbourne, which is only a stone's throw away, so that is very relevant, as far as I am concerned. Sir, I do not know where the Honourable Member is coming from and therefore, I will not be detracted from the points I am making.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central talked about a small shopping centre in that area.

Sir, when we bring tourists to the Conference Centre, we have to make them comfortable. We want to have them spending money in the country. Therefore, I am saying we need to improve the infrastructure within Bridgetown and the surrounding areas, so that there is not a great piling up of garbage in the streets, or urine in the alleys, because of the fact that inadequate public conveniences were provided.

I am saying we need to ensure that we give impetus to business persons, to put more money into redeveloping Bridgetown, because what is happening is that Bridgetown has been dying, as the last Government abandoned it, and a lot of business persons are now investing in Malls outside of Bridgetown.

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House and misleading all of us at the same time. The Honourable Member is speaking about Bridgetown dying. Sir, Bridgetown is not dying and therefore, the Honourable Member would have to withdraw those remarks.

Mr. Speaker, when the Honourable Member comes to this Honourable House, the Honourable Member has to bring relevance to support his contention that Bridgetown is dying. Sir, when people listen to this Debate, they would realise that Bridgetown is not dying.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. George North, it is a matter of opinion. Please continue Honourable Member.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Mr. Speaker, I really do not want to spend too much time in giving chapter and verse of the neglect of Bridgetown. For example, there is the Empire Theatre building, which is collapsing as we speak. Its galvanise is blowing all over the place, whenever there is a high wind. This is a place that could be developed as an entertainment centre, to entertain those tourists who come to the Sherbourne Conference Centre for conferences. That is what I am talking about.

Mr. Speaker, I am also talking about the Pierhead Development Project, where an Act of Parliament was initiated by the last Government, who accepted that they failed to inspire their private sector counterparts to ensure that the Pierhead Redevelopment Project.

Mr. D. D. MARSHALL: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown is grossly misleading this Honourable House. Sir, if the Honourable Member would bother to access any of the information that is already in the public domain, the Honourable Member would know that the Pierhead Development Project was a project of the Barbados Shipping and Trading, and that the Barbados Government made an equity investment in that project. Sir, it was never for the Government of Barbados to secure any private sector partner. It was for the Barbados Shipping and Trading to secure its private sector partners and develop the project. It had nothing at all to do with the Government.

Asides.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Mr. Speaker, I was only referring to the former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter, where I heard him at a public event before the last General Election, lamenting the fact that his Government had failed to inspire the private sector entity, to which the Honourable Member referred, to effectively implement and bring that Pierhead Development Project to fruition.

The Honourable Member said that his Government would have had to be going back to the drawing-board to even possibly get other partners. The Honourable Member accepted they had failed the country and that the Pierhead Development Project is very important to improve the issue of marinas and hotel plants within the City, to improve night entertainment, among other things.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am saying, as the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown, I look forward to the Democratic Labour Party rescuing that project, to ensure that Bridgetown flourishes, so that we could ensure that the thousands who would flock to the Sherbourne Conference Centre to attend conferences, would spend some of that foreign exchange in Barbados, so that as the Honourable Member for St. Lucy mentioned about the issue of community tourism, that we could have Nelson Street rehabilitated, so that the place would not be falling down with dilapidated buildings, that entertainment as occurs in Oistins would come back down to Baxters Road, where poor people from New Orleans, Chapman Lane, Barbarees Hill, Bridgetown and throughout urban Barbados, would be able to come and sell their fish, pudding and souse, cou-cou, their craft to these persons, so that Barbadians could share in the economic benefits to be derived from tourism, and not just the big businesses.

Sir, it is not just a question of all-inclusive tourism where the money does not come in to Barbados, but we would have the small retailers and small business persons getting some sort of tangible benefits from the improvement of tourism.

Mr. Speaker, I end by supporting and congratulating the Government at this early stage of our term, for focussing on the development of conference tourism through the Sherbourne Conference Centre and indeed, for honouring this great builder of Barbados, Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. R. St.C TOPPIN: Mr. Speaker, I propose to be very brief. Sir, I think that as we are on a Debate on the issue of renaming, I believe that we should rename the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown That is all the Honourable Member ever seems to come here talking about.

(Certain remarks made by the Honourable Member for St. Michael North were ordered expunged from the records by Mr. SPEAKER.)

Mr. R. St.C. TOPPIN: Mr. Speaker, I would want to begin with agreeing with the renaming of the Sherbourne Conference Centre after Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford.

Sir, I have been a Member of this Party at a time when his first recognition was conferred, when he was, in fact, Knighted. Sir, he was not knighted by the Democratic Labour Party, but by the Barbados Labour Party.

I was also at the time not in Parliament, but I remember that it was Sir Lloyd who found himself pilloried and brought down to the point where he had to announce public: AGod, help me to know my friends, my enemies I can take care of.@ Sir, this was in reference to his own colleagues on That Side. Sir, in fact, it was Honourable Members on That Side who joined with the Government of the day to bring Sir Lloyd down.

Mr. Speaker, I have no difficulty in recognising and acknowledging my support for the continuation and recognition of the work done by Sir Lloyd.

Mr. Speaker, I will agree that the building has to be completed and that the Democratic Labour Party could feel free to complete the remaining 8 per cent of the building that remains to be completed.

H:No. A6 (12)12:00 noon.

M - 1

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Mr. R. St.C. TOPPIN: Mr. Speaker, I have heard the contribution of the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central and I am not here to just criticise for criticizing, sake but I must confess that I was heartened by the comments of the Minister of Tourism in terms of the plans that he has for the company, Barbados Conference Services Limited. Sir, I say that in all earnest and I hope that the plans would come to fruition. It really reflects that when the structure was first built, there was really no plan, because the Minister is now saying that we did not put a plan in place and that he is now going to do it.

Sir, if a criticism is to be made about when a plan is to be put in place, it certainly would be when the project is on the way and being conceptualized. You must have a plan for it. Sir, the fact that the Minister now recognises the need for a plan is clear admission of their lack of knowledge, lack of research, lack of vision at the time when the project was being undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, I do not share the Honourable Member=s view of tourism that the company has not been functioning well, because even on the read-out that he gave, in terms of the losses, the losses that the Honourable Member announced were systematically declining. I would really have wished to hear authentically the figures in relation to the last two years of profit or loss because, apart from one year, the figures show a consistent decline in the losses over the years. Sir, it really has been performing well enough....

Hon. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Speaker, on a point of elucidation. Sir, I went back to 1999 where the losses were \$300 000.

Mr. R. St.C. TOPPIN: Mr. Speaker, it is really not unusual, although I must confess that the figures published earlier by the Honourable Member painted a different picture from what he just said. Sir, it is not unusual for a company to make losses in its early years of existence. What you could look at is what benefits are being derived, in the case of this company, by Barbados as a result of the operations of the company.

Sir, the Honourable Member was also clear to point out that there were a number of memorable conferences still being spoken about when he travelled that was arranged and hosted by this company. Sir, I do not agree with what he said about the company. He did not pillory the company but he was giving a negative impression of the company. I look forward to a year from now when the Honourable Member reports back, as he would have to, to see a turn-around in these losses that he has now elucidated upon. Sir, I am prepared to give him the chance, because the plan sounds impressive and I am not here to criticise for criticising sake.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is incumbent on the Government to ensure that it goes after this area of conference tourism with serious determination and grit. We saw determination that has already been in existence. Sir, this must not be lessened, because it is not the only facility in Barbados that offers conference tourism, but perhaps one in which the Government has an interest and we would want to see and know that it excels. Sir, at this stage in our history, we need to pursue it, because Barbados in recent times, less than a week ago, has been hit very hard by the Democratic Labour Party and the repercussions are going to be vast, negatively so, on the Barbadian people.

The recent announcement to the cost of living will impact, perhaps, every single sector of the economy and on every single individual in this country, the draconian and catastrophic measures recently announced by the Democratic Labour Party. Therefore, it is incumbent that we use every single avenue at our disposal to ensure that we can offset some of that negative fallout. The fallout of

the impact of the economy that would result from the way the new Government has treated the people of Barbados over the past few weeks or so. Sir, I am pleased that the plans have been announced.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to end by saying that if you have a centre that you are projecting is going to continue to do well, particularly in the area of conference tourism, it should do well if these things are put in place, because a business traveller is less price-sensitive than a vacationer, so it is a good niche to get into to ensure you can get maximum economic returns for the country. Sir, to go hand in hand with that, I do support the notion that there should be some proper accommodation facility in the area.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the location of an official residence has to be cast in stone, or that an official residence, once located in point A, has to remain so located forever. Therefore, if it is the view, and I believe it should be the view that some hotel accommodation be provided, there is no virtue in a Prime Minister's residence being next to a conference centre. If we have decided that the conference centre is going to be developed and fully utilised to the maximum, I believe we can look seriously at relocating the official residence of the Prime Minister somewhere else and that facility that now exists at Ilaro Court can provide certainly more than 100 bedrooms, which the Minister spoke of for the hotel sector. Sir, I would have no difficulty in supporting a decision to relocate the official residence to ensure that a proper hotel is built on the facility.

Mr. Speaker, I support the Resolution before Parliament. I support the announcement by the Minister of Tourism for the plans for the facility, but I will be back to this in a year's time; I give him some time. Sir, I am obliged to you.

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

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to join this debate and to signal my concurrence and support to this Resolution in relation to leasing of lands at Sherbourne to the Barbados Conference Services Limited. Sir, in so joining this Debate, it is very relevant to outline a number of developments, which seem to have only caught the attention of Honourable Members on the Other Side of late.

It is very interesting that the Honourable Member for St. Joseph was able to relate to this House the many plans that they had to approve this lease of the Sherbourne property to Barbados Conference Services Limited and interestingly as this Parliament continues, we will see many of those instances coming from the Other Side.

Sir, if I had the opportunity to encourage this House, and if the House had the power to confer honorary degrees, I would probably want to urge the House to confer some honorary degrees on the Other Side in their new capacity as advisors because they seem to be taking on that role to advise on so many things. Mr. Speaker, the truth must be told that it is amazing that it was only August 14, 2008, that the Barbados Labour Party Government, as it then was, turned its attention to this issue of the leasing of the leasing of the property at

12.10 p.m.

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Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Sherbourne to the Barbados Conference Services Limited. It tells us where they were in terms of its vision, as it relates to the Barbados Conference Services Centre, and the need to ensure that these properties were so arranged, legally, that the Barbados Conference Services Centre was given a life-line.

I want to compliment the Honourable Minister of Housing, for within only three months of office, of moving with swiftness and dispatch to ensure that this issue, which so dogged the previous Government, was brought to a speedy conclusion.

Sir, the decision that we are approving today is much wider than we have so far appreciated. By ensuring that we can conclude the lease of these properties to the Barbados Conference Services Limited, what we have done in effect, is to ensure that the issues raised by the Honourable Minister of Tourism, as it relates to the inability of the Barbados Conference Services Limited to finance itself, that particular problem is addressed.

Sir, a lease of the property at Sherbourne to the Barbados Conference Services Limited, allows that company to go on the open market and negotiate loan finance, that ensures the mandate which was entrusted to this company, can be fulfilled.

I do not know how many people understand that the Barbados Conference Services Limited was established primarily with a goal of ensuring that the provision of conference services in Barbados can be accelerated, and the vision, when that company was established, was such, that the management of the Centre was such, that it would become the prime venue for conferences, exhibitions and meetings. Although the Conference Centre has been utilised to a large extent for some of these, it has, in my opinion, not been utilised in the way that it was envisioned.

Sir, it is clearly our mandate, and we have already seen in term of the decision to finalise the lease, that this Democratic Labour Party will be focussed on a major development plan. I am very heartened to hear from the Minister of Tourism, of the plans which he outlined for that property at Sherbourne.

I listened carefully to the last Honourable Member who sat, because he indicated to this House that it is not unusual for a company within its early years of existence to incur losses. It will be insightful for him to know that the Barbados Conference Services Limited was not only established. In fact, this company was incorporated in the Registry on April 1, 1998, and based on my maths, I have counted almost 10 years of the company's existence in relation to its mandate.

If it took the Barbados Labour Party Administration 10 years to even conceptualise or think, because I think the Honourable Member for St. Joseph said that it was in their contemplation. I find that these words are being used more and more often, where things that ought to be done for the benefit and development of this country, and that they should have done, were only in their contemplation, but we never really got any meaningful action or solutions.

Sir, I really feel the pain of the Barbados Labour Party at this time, because I want to predict that as we continue our sojourn, in ensuring that we fulfill the mandate invested in us by the people of Barbados, we will hear in these Honourable Chambers, many manifestations of things which were within the contemplation of the Barbados Labour Party, but which we have shown and will continue to show by our actions, that we are serious about providing meaningful solutions for the improvement of Barbados.

Sir, I want to say categorically that the development of the property at Sherbourne, I believe that we have an opportunity to be more visionary in relation to the development of the Sherbourne property. Given my experience, particularly at the constituency level, where, in my view, the Barbados Labour Party Government left a significant level of unemployment in this country, that any plans to develop Sherbourne must have at its centre, the creation of employment, particularly among the young people who have been abandoned by the Barbados Labour Party for 14 years.

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The Honourable Member for Christ Church West Central is misleading this House.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you are not allowed to ascribe us a motive to an Honourable Member. Is he misleading the Honourable House deliberately?

Mr. G.A. CLARKE: Yes, deliberately, because the unemployment figure stands at less than 8 per cent. Therefore, the Honourable Member cannot say that we left a significant number of people unemployed. Significant cannot be less than eight per cent. That is almost full employment

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: I cannot see the point of order. Honourable Member for Christ Church West Central, please continue.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Sir, I will proceed, because in my own experience, and I was speaking from my own experience and not statistical data, which obviously is within the mind of the Other Side.

Sir, I am saying that the extent of unemployment which is in this country, and which has been left by the Barbados Labour Party Administration, this facility and the opportunity at Sherbourne must be seen within the light of a new thrust by this Government, to create employment for those who have been abandoned by the previous Government, particularly the younger people, and those hundreds who I see in my clinics on a weekly basis.

Sir, the issue of conference tourism. I believe we are now going to see a new thrust by this Administration, to my mind, which can generate the kind of jobs that we need in this country. I believe that the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown alluded to this. The five-mile radius area of the Barbados Conference Centre, which would include Bridgetown and the new ABC Highway, I believe that if we are seriously planning for Conference Tourism and in taking the development of the Sherbourne property to its next level, I believe that we have to look at the whole question of the transportation flow in and around the Conference Centre.

Sir, I believe that if we are talking about Conference Tourism, and the rapid movement of persons who we invite and who we have, by virtue of promotions overseas, we expect to attract to Barbados, we must include in that plan the rapid movement of persons from the airport, seaport and hotels, to a new redeveloped Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre. It is my view that we cannot be looking only at ground transportation.

12.20 p.m.

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Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Sir, when we have major activities, I witness the sirens blaring, as the police try to move people to and from Sherbourne. Sir, I want to put on the Table that in looking at the development of Sherbourne in a holistic way, we consider the question of the use of monorail connecting the catchment areas into Sherbourne. Mr. Speaker, the monorail has been used very effectively in other countries, which have done very well in relation to conference tourism. Sir, we recognise the need to ensure - especially where we have land-use problems in terms of the density, and the already crowded roads in Barbados - that we consider the use of the monorail. Sir, I hope that the Minister of Transport, will see this as a collaborative effort with his colleagues, as we focus on a tourism product, within the Sherbourne complex that will take us, not only in relation to solving some of our unemployment problems, but in seeing conference tourism in a futuristic way.

Mr. Speaker, we are not only planning for the next five years, but we have to see a redevelopment of Sherbourne, within at least the next 15 years. I certainly applaud the position where we are at present. Certainly, Sherbourne could never have been conceptualised without a Strategic Plan and a strategic vision.

Mr. Speaker, I recall as a public officer some years ago, being on the spot at Sherbourne while the sod was being turned and I had the privilege of witnessing the turning of the sod at Sherbourne. I also had the pleasure and privilege of hearing the visionary enunciations from the then Democratic Labour Party Government in relation to Sherbourne. Sir, usually the projects that are conceptualised by the Democratic Labour Party are put on hold, when the Barbados Labour Party comes to office. Mr. Speaker, I think what would have happened in relation to Sherbourne was, in fact, a reverse psychological reality for the Barbados Labour Party. Sir, they recognised that Sherbourne was beginning to do so well, that they had no choice than to begin to look to some extent in terms of the utility of Sherbourne.

Mr. Speaker, it cannot be acceptable that having established a company, charged with the responsibility in April 1998, and having charged the Barbados Conference Services Limited with the limited responsibility of managing Sherbourne, that it took That Side in excess of 10 years to even think about how the facility should be used.

Sir, it has always been a fact, that the Barbados Conference Services Limited has faced financial problems. This is not a secret. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the record, you will see that the Barbados Conference Services Limited has always had challenges, even with the level of Government funding that it received, which has always been, and can only have been inadequate, if in fact your

vision is for this company to be at the fore-front of conference tourism in this country, in an era of tourism development globally, where, in fact, you had companies that are empowered to actually find independent financing to fulfill their mandate. Therefore, what we have heard so far from the Other Side can only be seen as excuses, and I believe that where we need to get to, in relation to Sherbourne, this Resolution basically underpins what has to happen. Clearly, within three swift months of being in Government, we are beginning to see what a true Government that is poised with energy should be really doing. Sir, this is why I have no difficulty in applauding this effort.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close by simply saying that the lease of the Sherbourne facilities and the visionary decision to recognise the efforts of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, in relation to Sherbourne, is only the beginning of the manifestation of the dream of this Democratic Labour Party Government to ensure that as we continue in office, we remain true to the undertakings and the promises that we made to Barbadians, in relation to the overall development of this country.

I believe that if we see Sherbourne as an opportunity to take, not only conference tourism to a new level, but that we link that with creating entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly for your young people, we will be at that point of truly revolutionising what we consider to be meaningful sustainable employment in Barbados. Sir, I hope that we will hear more of this, as I am giving a few ideas and throwing out suggestions, in relation to Sherbourne that we would put our heads together and think forward.

Mr. Speaker, I am obliged to you, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

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

Hon. F. J. STUART: I beg to second that, Sir.

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

House A6, Sequence 15, 12.17 p.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER: This Sitting is resumed.

Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Mr. Speaker Sir, I am happy at this time and honoured to join this Debate for the lease of the property we familiarly known as Sherbourne Conference Centre to the Barbados Conference Services for further development and usage for the Barbados nation.

I am particularly thrilled also to be part of a Government who today announced the naming of this Sherbourne Conference Centre after that great Barbadian, Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford.

Mr. Speaker, I want to join with the Honourable Members on This Side and with the Honourable Member for St. James North who, in his contribution, made clear mention to the achievements of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, not only as the Prime Minister of this country, but in his early calling as a teacher.

Mr. Speaker, I remember well Sir Lloyd, then the young Erskine Sandiford, leading what was a revolution in the late 1960s to the establishment of the Barbados Community College. I was a student at that time. I recall sitting my "O" level exams without the assistance of any teaching, because of the resulting disquiet and the actions of some teachers of the day who probably, very much like the Barbados Labour Party in the 14 years they piloted the affairs of this country, could not see far enough into the future

Mr. Speaker, today, we have a Barbados Community College which is definitely still inadequate to meet the needs of the young aspiring Barbadians. Indeed, we have a Sherbourne Conference Centre or now a Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre, which is indeed bursting with possibilities, which has even come to light to the Honourable Members on That Side.

We, therefore, are charged as a Government, with the responsibility to make sure that the development of the Sherbourne Complex is for the purpose which it was envisaged. We speak against a background of a Barbados Labour Party, who threw snide remarks at this complex. They were not easy. I remember at one political meeting the former Prime Minister, the Honourable Member for St. Peter, who likes to boast of his prowess, sharpened his tongue on both sides and verbally assaulted Barbadians, and spoke to the fact that he has been invited to the opening of Sherbourne Conference Centre and indicated they must be opening the front, because the back is opened already.

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Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Mr. Speaker, it is the kind of contempt with which they held that property. Therefore, for the Opposition to come in today, like persons washed in the blood as they say, with all these dreams for Sherbourne, is to try to fool Barbadians, but we are understanding very clearly, that the Barbadian public recognise that we, as a Government have got to work and work hard, to make sure that the benefits they expect and the benefits that we promised in our Manifesto, could accrue to Barbadians. Sir, they recognised only too well the playing-field which has been left for us, in respect of the responsible management of the economy and to the responsible management of our resources.

Mr. Speaker, we are not reneging from our responsibilities in this area.

Sir, when the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown spoke, we had countenance on That Side, as he referred to Bridgetown. Sir, the truth is that Barbados is a small island, 21 miles long by 14 miles wide, and that at any point in Barbados, with the correct level of transport development, the correct level of road network development, it is, in fact, accessible. Sir, in many respects, the location at Sherbourne can be termed as being central to the road network of Barbados. This, I think, would therefore bring into consideration all those lands of which the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown spoke, when he referred to possible development to benefit Sherbourne. Sir, for example, he spoke of places such as the Bay Street window and the other areas of the City, which are only too familiar to us.

Mr. Speaker, I represent a Constituency which includes a thriving tourism plant and a growing economic opportunity for Barbadians of all walks of life, to participate and to provide entertainment and to provide cuisine to visitors, so that visitors at Sherbourne would want to take advantage of the development at places such as Oistins and Dover.

Mr. Speaker, as I speak to Dover, my memory is again sparked. I am sure the Barbados Labour Party pushed down the Dover Convention Centre as a deliberate act and they are putting up a number of condominium developments. It was the only medium-sized conference centre in the island at the time. Sir, I do not know if any Honourable Members Over There would want to challenge that. Sir, nobody on This Side is against development, but it must come with the balance that reflects a government that is thinking about 10 and 20 years on.

Mr. Speaker, even as Honourable Members on That Side spoke to the uncontrolled amassing of condominiums in this island, that Administration turned a deaf ear. Therefore, to hear them today speaking about these plans and about these glorious ideas they had for Sherbourne, I

must ask the questions, what happened to the hotels? What happened to the parking? What happened to the roadways they said should have been developed to assist Sherbourne?

Sir, the truth is that the only thing they did with Sherbourne in their 14 years, was to locate the Ministry of Tourism there. Sir, Sherbourne sold itself and did everything else on its own. All they did with Sherbourne, as a deliberate act, was to locate the Ministry of Tourism there.

Mr. Speaker, today in another act, unthought, without any research, but being stated just to attract public attention I suppose, we heard the Honourable Member for St. Michael North talking about replacing the residence of the Prime Minister, by some property to serve the rooming needs of a convention centre like that of Sherbourne.

Mr. Speaker, in today's day and age, when you have the technology to support high-rise buildings, there is no need to go to these extents to destroy our already built architecture, or our already built environment, to create something else. We have the technology that would allow us to put up even a hotel property, even on the residual lands of Sherbourne, one that would be satisfying, at one and the same time, the parking needs of a convention centre, one capable of entertaining approximately 2 000 persons and providing rooms with the correct designs and applications of technology, but they are not accustomed to that.

Mr. Speaker, the Resolution speaks to the question of the maintenance and the development of that property but again that Administration is not accustomed to that either. We have now found that we will have to spend thousands and thousands of dollars trying to bring back, not only Sherbourne, but to bring back Government properties.

Sir, I have already spoken to this and will continue to speak ad nauseum, because it must be dealt with, and the people of Barbados must know when we spend their money, why we are doing it. We are doing it to preserve good solid buildings, which have been allowed to run to ruin under the Barbados Labour Party Administration, while they had all the funds in the world at their disposal. They talked about all the watersheds, in terms of collection from VAT and other incomes which they had to develop this island, yet they could not see it fit to put in place an effective plan for Sherbourne and for anywhere else.

Mr. Speaker, they squirmed at the reference to the Pierhead Development Project, when I watched on the Opposition Side, not sitting in here, but in front of my television, when they thumped their chests for about three days when they introduced the Pierhead Development Act in this country. Sir, I am sure that all Honourable Members

would remember the kind of boastful showmanship which accompanied that legislation. Sir, it is as if the Gods did not like how they behaved because nothing has happened since the passing of that legislation.

Mr. Speaker, unlike Sherbourne, we took up the Pierhead Development Project, just where we had left it. Sir, with the kind of modest leadership which our Honourable Minister of Housing and Lands is bringing to this question of land development in Barbados, the kind of modest leadership with which this organisation is charged, in making sure that the needs of ordinary Barbadians are met. I know that the Gods will smile on us that we will find partners and we will find the guts and the proverbial political strength to make sure that these projects come to fruition.

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Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Mr. Speaker, they have challenged us to bring a report in a year on where the Barbados Conference Services Limited goes and, Sir, we will bring our report.

The Minister of Tourism spoke of a Strategic Plan, and any person with a modicum of appreciation of what a Strategic Plan is about, knows that it will take some time. The point is that there is a plan and it will be laid before all of Barbados to see. It is not, Sir, like the dreams that we heard today coming from the Other Side. It is not like that at all. They talk about multi-purpose and, Sir, even as they babble on That Side, in their innocence they did not recognise that they were admitting to the multi-purpose plan for the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

An examination centre, yes, I heard that too, an auditorium, Sir, I heard that too and I am sure you did, Sir, but they now pretend that if an organisation presents a plan for a multi-purpose centre, it is tantamount to saying, you do not know what you are doing. They say that on one side of their mouth, but on the Other Side of their mouth, they want to be part of this whole multiple development of the Sherbourne Conference Centre and want to have their names ascribed to the programme. Sir, no way. It will not be. They never subscribed to it, they never supported Sherbourne. They treated it badly, they refused to spend an iota, a cent on it. They refused to look after the wholesome development of this facility.

Mr. Speaker, their whole attitude towards the development of Barbados was not about wholesome wide-angled approach to development. They had an espoused policy that land must fetch its highest value. Sir, I cannot see him, but I know that we have a Minister of Agriculture

who even in today's newspaper, we can speak to the emphasis on growing food for the people of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity and it was an experience. Sir, only last week, I was asked to see after that Ministry when the Minister was out of the island on Government business, and at my first discussion with the Permanent Secretary, I was left thrilled at the kind of mission statement. The Minister said to his staff that he wants to see food in the ground at Graeme Hall and I want to commend him in the Chamber for that approach. Sir, that is what Graeme Hall is about and the Ministry of Agriculture and, Sir, it looks beautiful. Mr. Speaker, there is nothing more beautiful than a ripened field of okras. Sir, have you ever seen an okra flower? It is a remarkable plant, it produces food and flower at the same time, in one breath, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the flower arrangers of this country are short-changing us when they do not use some of the pumpkin seed and the okra flower in their arrangements. I will speak to those whom I may have influence over, to see if we can write some of these things.

Sir, these are all interesting connections to the whole approach to how we do business in Barbados today, as the Democratic Labour Party Government, as against how the former Government did business. Sir, theirs was driven by money and God knows what else, but ours is driven by recognising a need to fulfill an all-embracing development policy, a commitment to the people of Barbados to make sure they are part of that development, to take them along with us on this journey into the future, assured that every step is measured, carefully contemplated and correctly executed.

Mr. Speaker, we must make sure, as we unfold the Democratic Labour Party's version of governance, that the people of Barbados continue to be interested because I have found that they are interested in the way we are doing things. They are interested in the way we tackle the fuel crisis. They are interested in the way we are tackling the question of housing for Barbadians. They are interested in the way we are looking at the provision of food for Barbadians. They are interested in the way we are looking at solving our transport problems without spending uncontrolled sums of money to achieve some quiet hidden objective, this objective, not obvious to anybody except the Barbados Labour Party.

We have asked for reviews precisely because of this blindness, because of the opaqueness of this policy. We have asked for reviews so that we can determine with the true technocrats in Barbados the ones trained in the same Barbados Community College, that Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford led the charge for and the University of the West Indies. It is these technocrats on whom we depend for our

contribution to solutions, and these solutions will be brought to bear in a way that will benefit all Barbadians.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to being part of the continued development of Sherbourne. I look forward to being part of the solutions to transport, which would allow us to use Sherbourne and all the other facilities in Barbados in a more effective and meaningful way. I look forward to being part of this holistic approach to the continued development of this small nation.

Sir, we are a small nation, but we are a great nation of strong people willing to take the challenge when it has to be taken and willing to make the sacrifice if it has to be made.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I want to indicate my unreserved support for this Resolution. I want to separately laud the Honourable Minister for honouring our former Prime Minister, Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, in this way today. I want to say this because honouring of our people is so important and, Sir, as a digression for one second, tomorrow evening at 3:00 o'clock, I am going to make a presentation to a lady in Oistins by the name of Berinda Cox, better known as 'Baby Doots' on her 91st birthday, a lady who was on the fore-front of the development of the selling of fish in Oistins and in the fishing community. I have indicated to the people of Oistins that we will make sure that their memories are created to the great fishermen of the past and while they are here to acknowledge them.

Sir, that is what we want to do and, therefore, I want to associate myself with this Resolution with the honouring of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford in this same Resolution and to commend, once again, the Honourable

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Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Member for St. Philip North, Minister of Housing, for a very fine job. I want to associate myself with all the positive remarks coming from This Side and, of course, the contribution from the Honourable Member for St. James North.

Thank you. I am obliged to you, Sir.

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

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give support to the Resolution to lease the 27 000 plus square metres of land at Sherbourne, Two Mile Hill, to the Barbados Conference Services Limited, and to join the comments issued by This Side, and those on the Other Side, who have commended this very important move, not

only to provide a lease to the Barbados Conference Services Limited, of the lands and facilities at Two Mile Hill, but also to give recognition of the outstanding work of the individual who conceived the idea of a major conference and cultural facility, at that particular venue.

Sir, I am reminded very much of the difficulties which, at that time, the Honourable Prime Minister experienced, as he sought to bring to the people of Barbados a slightly different vision from that which we were hitherto accustomed.

As I search my own memory, I am reminded of the work of Martin Carter, that well-known Guyanese Poet. In one of his pieces from his work, 'Poems of Resistance, Death of a Hero,' as I search my mind, I would just want to share with the Honourable House, and you can make connections between that piece of work of Martin Carter and what happened to Sir Lloyd during that period of time, and what eventually happened to him as persons looked into their own consciences and recognised that this man was in fact, committed to the development of Barbados, that this man pitted his heart, head and back against the onslaught of many, including many on our soil, to ensure that Barbados retained its integrity, that Barbados retained its purpose, and that we could trumpet loudly to all and sundry, particularly the last Government, that Barbados was a country focussed on the development of its people.

Sir, that poem reads:

ADeath must not find us thinking that we die too soon, too soon,

Our banners drape for you,

I would prefer the banner in the wind, Not bound so tightly in a scarlet fold.

But flashing on the pole we bear aloft,

Down and beyond these dark, dark lanes of rags.

Dear Comrade, if you speak no more with me,

Nor smile no more with me,

Then let me take a patience and a calm,

For even now brighter leaves unfold,

And all the river burns,

Now from the mourning vanguard moving on,

I salute you and say, death must not find us thinking that we die.@

Sir, if you have some appreciation of the work of Martin Carter and the beauty of his poetry, one can well relate these works to the journey of Sir Lloyd, particularly during the most difficult periods of the early 1990s. Therefore, I am proud to align myself with the movement issued by the Honourable Member for St. Philip North, the Honourable Minister of Housing and Lands, and all of the others who have spoken to this recognition.

Sir, I believe the last speaker, my colleague and friend, the Honourable Member for Christ Church South, issued a truth. That truth is, we must not look to honour persons in their death throes, but honour them when they are alive, when their eyes can peep upon their work. This must not be a posthumous recognition of the work of people.

Sometimes we forget, because the memory of man is not all that perfect. The memory of man can sometimes be short, but this Democratic Labour Party, this Government of the day, has placed itself upon a path that is fair, that is just, that is equitable, that recognises the value of those who have made contributions.

Sir, I have not qualified that, by saying outstanding contributions, because history pages contain the work of simple men from humble origins, who have made outstanding contributions to their societies, and we in this land must give due recognition to those faithful soldiers and comrades who have run the gauntlet, who have stood in the trenches and worked on behalf of the people of Barbados, ridiculed, reviled, even.

I remember those days, not with anger now, but with anger then, but the soothing words of Christ sometimes must come up in our bosoms to remove that anger which one felt at the time, to be replaced by celebration which should now be engulfing the people of Barbados, as we have renamed the facility at Sherbourne 'The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Culture Centre' or cultural facility.

Sir, a man dragged across the broken and pothole roads of Barbados as ...

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House. He is saying that his political Party, which I serve...

Mr. SPEAKER: He did not say that. Honourable Member, please take your seat. He did not say that, please.

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, he must be clear.

Mr. SPEAKER: He did not say that. Please, take your seat.

Hon. R. D. JONES: One of the good things of this life is that the guilty conscience must always reveal otherwise. He might not be able to sleep at night.

Sir, I am making the point, that out of the misfortunes of others, they are those who are running to take the middle ground. Therefore, the Honourable Member for St. George North seems to be one of those individuals who want to run and take the middle ground, but it is one that he might be quite comfortable with in his daily lifestyle.

Nevertheless, I think it is important that this individual, Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, should be held up in this country for his work, for his commitment, and for his love of his people. Sometimes we forget that the journey taken by individuals who serve is an extremely lonely journey.

Sir, being Prime Minister of Barbados can be a lonely job, sleepless nights...

Asides.

Hon. R. D. JONES: Some that you have never had, some that you will never get, not if the good people of Barbados continue to exercise good sense and good judgment. You should be placed in the wilderness, not for 40 years, but for 4 000 years.

Asides.

Hon. R. D. JONES: Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is a proud moment. It is not a moment of a memorial, but it is a moment of celebration.

Sir, this Government will therefore, not be caught napping, as it looks across this landscape, either in a deliberate manner, or as the occasion occurs to recognise in some practical form the work of all of our citizens from every walk of life, and this is Sir Lloyd's day, as we lease this land at Sherbourne.

2.10 p.m.

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Tuesday, April 22, 2008 House A6, Sequence 20, 2.10 p.m.

Hon. R. D. JONES: The Honourable Member for St. George North would refer to such momentous occasions as simple, but only the simple mind could see a matter like this, as simple. This is not a simple matter. This is a profound matter, because it recognises contribution. This is a philosophical statement being made to citizens.

Sir, one of the Honourable Members on the Other Side, in true spirit of non-partisanship, recognised the contributions of Sir Lloyd. I am speaking of the Honourable Member for St. James North, who spoke in glowing terms, not only of Sir Lloyd's contribution to education, but of Sir Lloyd's contribution and his vision, in ensuring that the structure at Sherbourne, Two Mile Hill, stood erect from across the land space of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that in the silliness of politics, in the silliness of divide and rule, in the silliness of not recognising the value and true worth of something, that the Barbados Labour Party Government never saw it fit to conclude the construction of that facility, yet, they were the first to rush in like air in an empty space to occupy it, and they occupied it with an exposed back-side. I wonder what pleasure they derived from that, Sir.

Asides.

Hon. R. D. JONES: You speak of that which you know.

Asides.

Hon. R. D. JONES: This Democratic Labour Party Government, with the resources of the people - because we have no resources of our own outside of our intellect, our capacity to do good, our intentions, our knowledge to do good - will ensure that we do good for the people of Barbados.

Asides.

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, that piece of real estate is a monument to good sense and to good judgment. It is a monument to what we have to do in Barbados to transform Barbados. Therefore, as has been said by one of the speakers today, we need a significant audit of cultural facilities in this country, if we are to take our cultural industries forward, industry in relation to dance, drama, poetry.

I have just from the residue, Mr. Speaker, of my memory, quoted verbatim, one of the works of Martin Carter, A Death of A Hero, and if as I journey now towards my three score years, can still have embedded in my memory such excellent work, how can we motivate our young people to understand the beauty of language, the beauty of poetry and prose to make meaning of life, embedded in the humanities as they are. Sir, that is what we need to do.

Mr. Speaker, yes, it is good to go to the rum shop and hear the language of those who are assembled there. This is poetry in itself, but it is not a facility where all might go or where all will go. Therefore, there is a

responsibility for those who are concerned with the development of the cultural products to create those institutions, to create those facilities.

I look forward to the day when The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Facility will be completed, where there is room not only for Government offices, and conference facilities, but where one can sit in comfort and listen to some of the beauty of our young people reflected through music, drama, dance and all of the other cultural activities that they now possess. What beauty will behold the eye, Honourable Member for Christ Church South, when all of our people can, with that momentum, and that movement, make us all feel alive. Sir, those who are spectators can be happy with the work of all of those young people.

Sir, Rihanna has taken on the world stage. We are proud. We celebrated her achievements in this country. There are so many others. I remember the renaissance of calypso, led by that giant from St. Philip, 'Red Plastic Bag' Stedson Wiltshire. Sir, so many other young people have come thus, with the beauty of their music to enliven our souls, and to give us an opportunity to breathe easier, as sons and daughters of Christ, and that is what we want, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I remember our Prime Minister at one time, he was not Prime Minister then, who was a leader in drama and dance. Therefore, we do not have to go now and hatch some new creation, because it is led from the front.

I am sure that the Honourable Member for St. Michael Central, who is our Cultural leader, aided and supported by the Democratic Labour Party's candidate for St. Andrew, aided and abetted by the Minister of Youth Affairs, supported, complemented and supplemented by the Minister of Education and Human Resources Development, will make sure that the foundations on which our cultural package will be so magnified, that more and more young people, more and more citizens of Barbados can see an opportunity to earn a living as they bring beauty to our souls, our eyes and to our minds. Therefore, it is not a simple Resolution. Dead minds speak of simplicity or nothing at all. It is the mind of emptiness, filled only with dastardly acts, manipulation of processes, undermining and corrupt deals, but the mind that is vigorous, the fertile mind that is interested in the development of the county, has no time at all for such meanderings.

Mr. Speaker, all the minds of the Honourable Members on This Side, fertile as they are, led by the Honourable Member for St. John, ably supported by the Honourable Member for St. Michael South, understand the beauty of language and how it is fashioned to make our people live. Therefore, when we script a song or write a verse, to be shown in any of our cultural facilities, when that audit is done and we are able to bring them to fruition

for our people, then all, including those who meander now in their minds, and shake their waists, will recognise that it is not talk, but action that does the job on behalf of the people of Barbados.

Asides.

Hon. R. D. JONES: I therefore salute today, Sir Lloyd and this recognition. This is not a guilty posture as emulated by those on the Other Side, but a true recognition of his work, his value, his creativity, his intellect and his purpose for Barbados.

Sir, those of us who have journeyed through the Barbados Community College are products of his ingenuity and his thought processes. It takes men of courage, men of backbone to fight a battle when no one else joins with them. It is a lonely place to be and there is no warmth there at all. Therefore, there are men who could stand alone and say, I have held the breach.

House A6, Sequence 20, 2.20 p.m.

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Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, I would say that death has not found repose in the bosom or in the mind of Sir Lloyd, but we have today flown our banner in the wind and saluted him and the Honourable Member for St. Philip North for having the courage to bring to this Honourable House, not only the lease of this land to the Barbados Conference Services Limited, but to say to the people of Barbados, this is recognition, may be the first of many, to Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford.

I thank you.

Hon. S. D. BLACKETT: Mr. Speaker, it is always very difficult to follow the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central, when he is waxing warm and in full flight as he was in his presentation just before this Honourable House.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be making a contribution to this Debate, the leasing of some 27 769 square metres of land to the Barbados Conference Services Limited.

Mr. Speaker, I often ask the question, what would Barbados be like without the Sherbourne Conference Centre? The unfinished Sherbourne Conference Centre is certainly a reflection of the spite of the last Administration. Sir, the incomplete St. John Polyclinic, the demolition of the Barbados Hilton, and the demolition of the Dover Conference centre, which the Honourable Member for Christ Church South just referred to, are all bound up in a total act of spite on the part of the last Administration.

Mr. Speaker, Sherbourne Conference Centre has provided accommodation for cultural expositions, conferences and exhibitions of international standards. Therefore, without a convention centre, or a facility of that standard, certainly we as a country would have been found wanting.

Mr. Speaker, it is against that background that I want to lump a lot of praise on a former Prime Minister of this country, Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford. Mr. Speaker, it is a must that the unfinished auditorium at the Sherbourne Conference Centre be completed, because it would provide a facility that is sorely lacking in this country at this time. Sir, there are a number of small theatres in Barbados, but they do not provide the kind of facilities which are needed for the exposition of our talents, especially when it comes to theatre and theatrical displays.

We have the Daphne Joseph Hackett Theatre, which is out of commission at this time. We have the Errol Barrow Centre which has just come on stream and we also have the facility at the Tom Adams Centre in Bridgetown. Therefore, it is a must that we move swiftly to have the auditorium there put back in use or completed to provide the kind of facilities for our theatre or our theatrical plays.

Mr. Speaker, it is to my mind poor planning strategy on the part of the last Administration to have been racking up the kind of losses that were enunciated by the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central. Sir, we ask, why the losses? Why could there not have been a proper Strategic Plan to be put in place in order for these losses to have been negated? Nevertheless, it is my belief that this Government will put this plan in place and we would see the benefits accruing in this matter.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Joseph alluded to the fact that we should have a hotel built near the Sherbourne Conference Centre. Certainly, it is my experience, by going to conventions across North America, that the hotel accommodation for the people attending conventions are miles away from the Convention Centre and people are normally bussed into the conventions in those countries. If it happens in North America, we are just 14 by 21 miles here in Barbados, and no place in Barbados is of any great distance away, so it can happen here too. Certainly, if our hotels are on the West and South Coasts, I see absolutely nothing wrong with bussing the conventioners into the Convention Centre at Sherbourne.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure that in November, we would be hosting the Organisation of American States Conference here in Barbados, and I am certain that the members who would be coming to Barbados to attend that conference would have absolutely no problem in being bussed from the South Coast, the West Coast or wherever they are coming from, to the Centre. The question of a

first-rate restaurant facility at the Sherbourne Conference Centre is a must, and I hope that is all part of whatever Strategic Plan is in place for the Centre, because it is greatly lacking at this time.

Mr. Speaker, re-naming the Sherbourne Conference Centre 'The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre' has been long in coming. His time has come as far as I am concerned. Sir Lloyd has been pilloried and ridiculed in this country, and I believe it is a fitting contribution to his foresight and vision for conceptualising and building a conference centre at Sherbourne.

I believe that history would be kind to Sir Lloyd, not only as a politician, but as a human being. I believe his name has been mentioned second most of all our past Prime Ministers in Barbados. Mr. Speaker, like I said, history would be kind to Sir Lloyd and I believe it is a fitting tribute to the former Prime Minister that the Sherbourne Conference Centre be named in his honour.

Mr. Speaker, I stand firmly behind the decision made by this Government in naming that centre after Sir Lloyd.

Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no reservation in throwing my full weight behind the leasing of the land to the Barbados Conference Services Limited and also to the renaming of the Sherbourne Conference Centre as "The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre."

I am obliged to you, Sir.

Dr. the Hon. D. S. LOWE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to add my thoughts to this Debate which under usual circumstances would be considered a very simple Resolution. Mr. Speaker, since the Resolution is also accompanied by the announcement that the Sherbourne Conference Centre would now be named 'The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre.' I believe that brings a certain level of significance to the Debate which is now underway in this Honourable Chamber.

House A6 Sequence 21

2.30 p.m.

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Dr. the Hon. D. S. LOWE: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to compliment my colleagues on This Side, who have done an outstanding job in representing the thoughts and views of this Government, as we seek to present this Resolution in its full form and as we seek passage of its approval.

Mr. Speaker, Sherbourne Conference Centre has always been at the centre of talk in this country. In the early days, it has generated a lot of criticism from the Barbados Labour Party as to the purpose, the function and even the right for Sherbourne to exist. The vision of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford was questioned then and today. I think it is fitting that this Sherbourne Conference Centre, soon to be renamed, has been able to prove its worth by virtue of how it has accommodated some of the greatest events to be hosted in Barbados in the last several years.

Mr. Speaker, I am of the view that the fact that the Sherbourne Conference Centre exists, is testimony of the vision of Sir Lloyd, because I believe when he contemplated that such a centre should exist, he understood that a conference centre is really a platform upon which a country is able to demonstrate the very important elements of its own existence. It is a place where there is the dispensing of knowledge in all fields. It is a place where the highest forms of cultural expressions can be displayed. It is a place where leaders from the world over can gather to have conversations with the people of Barbados. Indeed, it is a place where the country says to the entire world, here is a centrepiece where we can engage in discussions and expressions of who we are, a centrepiece that should exist in any progressive and developing society.

Mr. Speaker, as we sit and listen to those on the Other Side giving expressions to their own views - and as one Honourable Member indicated, to their own feelings of guilt - it is amazing today, that we could hear some of the most glowing expressions of what a great master-piece is the Sherbourne Conference Centre. Sir, in fact, long before the Barbados Labour Party acknowledged the worth and value of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford was in the forefront of demonstrating his vision and his understanding of how a society must develop, and the kind of services it must offer, not only to its citizens, but to the people in the Region and indeed, the people of the wider global society.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is instructive that we should always understand that if we do not carefully analyse the purpose for which visionary leaders expound on their views and their ideas and bring systems into being, then we should not be so quick to cast aspersions on those ideas and those actions. Sir, I believe that if I were an Honourable Member on the Other Side, today I might not be so glowing in my tributes, not only to Sir Lloyd, but to my acknowledgment of the worth and value of a place like the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that most of us, if not all of us, would have had the opportunity to travel different parts of the world. Some of us would have had the opportunity to live in different parts of the world, and we do understand

the value that should be attached to a place like the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

Sir, the truth is that when you think of what could have been, as it relates to the Sherbourne Conference Centre, if in the last 14 years the then Government had invested the same level of interest in the development of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, perhaps today all of us could sing in harmony a tune that would reflect our collective agreement on the role and right of the Sherbourne Conference Centre to exist.

Mr. Speaker, let us imagine, the Sherbourne Conference Centre is still largely unfinished. Imagine this: a Government has spent 14 years in office. Imagine this: the current rental cost of the Government is exorbitant, and imagine this: The Sherbourne Conference Centre has amazing accommodation capacity where, if the Government was interested in promoting the vision, they could have saved the State a tremendous amount of money.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Sherbourne Conference Centre would become infamous for one thing. It was the place where an Honourable Member from That Side was fired and was shamelessly escorted from his office. Sir, this was in the same building where the Government refused to complete and at a time, where this country could have benefitted, not only in terms of conference services, but in terms of its capacity to occupy the same Sherbourne Conference Centre. Sir, we must now pick up that vision and run with it again.

Mr. Speaker, that is not unusual, because a number of things the Democratic Labour Party started in this country were not completed by the Barbados Labour Party and again, as is usual, we are called upon to pick up the mantle and to run with these projects.

Sir, let me say that I have every confidence in our Government, that we will do justice, not only to the completion of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, but to every project that is worthwhile to the development of this country.

Mr. Speaker, there must come a time in our journey as a developing country, where we understand the value of continuity, where we put political spite aside, where we allow the engines of development to continue to run, with some semblance of continuity. Sir, that is why our Government is insistent that it will carefully evaluate any existing projects, and make sensible decisions as to what should be continued, and what should not be continued, because we would not like to know that 15 or 20 years from now, when we would have demitted office, that any Administration would come and suggest that if we had done X, Y, or Z, that the country could have benefitted and benefitted significantly.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that as we contemplate the continuation of the development of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, we must contemplate it in a number of contexts. First of all, wherever I have gone, there has been a thriving conference centre at the heart of business of most cities that I would have visited. Wherever I have gone, there has always been a commitment to ensure that there is a center-piece, where a variety of activities of the State could be undertaken, and where there are certain symbols of our history and certain symbols of our development so housed.

Sir, I would like to believe that the challenge is not whether or not people could move from the north, the south or the east, to get to the Sherbourne Conference Centre. The real challenge is understanding that in a changing economy, where, for example, in tourism there is now a move where hotels are disappearing and condominiums are appearing. There is now a reality where the Conference Centres or facilities that should be available are not available. It now even makes it more important that the Sherbourne Conference Centre must finally come into its own.

Sir, the Democratic Labour Party will give it its right of passage to exist as one of the modern wonders of the Region, where we will continue to attract business, bring in foreign exchange, provide job opportunities and provide entrepreneurial development for those persons who would want to be involved in the business of conferencing, if you will.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that as we give sober contemplation to this Resolution and firmly consent to its approval, because of the value that we place on this Resolution, relative to the development of this country and relative to the development of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, that we learn from the past, and that we recognise that this country must fight for those ideas that will give rise to full development of our people and full expressions of who we are.

2.40 p.m.

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Dr. the Hon D.S. LOWE: Mr. Speaker, I believe we should learn from this very exercise, that we should not allow our own political biases to hinder us from pursuing those activities that would redound to the benefit of all Barbadians, but that we would continue to strive to use our collective vision and passion to promote those ideas that would give this country a wonderful opportunity to be showcased for the people of the world.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that it must have been courageous on the part of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford to

have fought through all the criticisms that were hurled at him.

Sir, this man is a man who is not unfamiliar when it comes to criticism because when the same Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford sought to stabilise the economy of Barbados and to steer this country through a most turbulent economic situation, he was also criticised, but we came to hear after we had passed the worse, as the old folk would say, that those who tried to berate him, were those who showered praises on him as one of the men that would go down as a man who guided this country through some of its most difficult times.

Mr. Speaker, I believe, if Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford is listening to this Debate today, that he must feel a sense of gratification, because he is a man who was prepared to follow his vision. A man who was prepared to follow his dream, a man who was always pushing things to their outer limit in order to be able to achieve a national good, that was far beyond the imagination of his critics. I think that today this House should be proud of the contribution of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford and the renaming of the Sherbourne Conference Centre is just but a small debt that we are paying to a great man who has lived in this society.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that all of us, regardless of what side of the aisle we may be on, all of us in here should acknowledge that the great courage of this man. I heard the Honourable Member for St. James North indicating the relationship between his insistence in the creation of a community college, associated with the same space where the Sherbourne Conference Centre is built, and now linking the two together as part of the impregnable vision of this great man, who has led this country through a most interesting time.

As a matter of fact, I would say this, Mr. Speaker, that the Barbados we know today is a Barbados that, because of the contributions of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, can be a proud champion in this Region when it comes to his economic policies and practices, and his social development strategy. I believe that he deserves all the praise that can be showered on him and I believe all the accolades that would be expressed today, through the Members of this august Chamber, would not suffice the depth of contribution that Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford has made to this country.

So long live Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford and long live Sherbourne Conference Centre, soon to be renamed in his honour. Long live his vision and long live the value attached to the very existence and presence of the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

The Democratic Labour Party will continue to push the envelope for development. The Democratic Labour Party Government will continue to ensure that it is not afraid to dream, and to dream big dreams even, when the products of those dreams are characterised as white elephants and the like. I believe it is important that any leader or group of leaders understand that to dream is not to be confined to the small minds of others, but that we have to be prepared to drive our vision and our focus, and to drive our ambitions and hopes far beyond what is being expressed or realised now in the society, so that we would be able to see things like this come to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, we would hope that as the Opposition sits on the Other Side and observes the work of this Government, even though it seeks to fool itself into believing that they sitting over there would only be for a short period of time, let me remind them that the people of this country have given us a mandate and that we intend to follow that mandate every step of the way. Sir, as long as we keep the people as part of the Government where there is no distance between the governed and those who govern, I anticipate that the will of the people will be realised, and that we will be here for a long time, as long as the people of Barbados intend for us to be here.

Mr. Speaker, we will not be pushed aside. We will not be distracted. We are going to do what we know is politically right, not just politically correct. We are going to do what we believe is part and parcel of the reason why the people of this country voted for this Party and this Government and, Mr. Speaker Sir, we are not going to be side-tracked. We are not going to be derailed. We are not going to allow ourselves to believe that we are not capable of doing what must be done, because we know on This Side that we have the capabilities, the attributes and the talent to achieve great things for this country.

Sir, even now, as was then, when Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford took this country through a most difficult time, as though it is the lot of the Democratic Labour Party Government, we are now faced with difficult times ahead, but we believe that the same courage that existed then and obtained then is the same courage that will obtain now, and with our Leader the Honourable Prime Minister, and all of us on This Side, and the will of the people of Barbados, we will continue to fight to ensure that our people always get a better deal, even when that better deal, seems to be unpopular in the eyes and minds of our opponents.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that today is a significant day in the halls of this august Chamber. It is a significant day in this country because, finally, a man that was ridiculed for the good he sought to bring to this country, today is now being hailed as a genius in his own right, and we give full recognition to his contribution.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

His Honour K. St.C. BEST: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the Resolution, but before I do so, I want to welcome you back to your Chair and I also want to welcome the Honourable Member for St. James North.

Sir, it is only but fitting, that I speak to this Resolution at the Sherbourne Conference Centre, because it falls within the Constituency of St. Michael East. It is also fitting that the naming of the Sherbourne Conference Centre as "The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre" is of significant importance, because Sir Lloyd was my teacher and the same place that the Cultural Centre is located now is where I attended school, and where I was taught, so you would see the significance and the importance it holds for me. I must laud the Minister of Housing for trying to speedily bring this Resolution and to ensure that the good works of the Government of the Democratic Labour Party will continue, and to let the people of Barbados know we are on track. They have given us a mandate and that mandate we will carry out without haste, without any victimisation of thoughts from people of the Other Side. If we have any stumbling blocks that have to be removed, they will be removed. That is the whole crux of the matter.

Mr. Speaker, I must support all my colleagues, who have spoken before me in respect of the glowing tributes made in respect of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford in this Chamber and the contribution and development he has made for this good country Barbados. I remember one famous quote he gave me as a student. He said that 'advice is something is the fool does not want and the wise does not take.'

2.50 p.m.

Sequence 23

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

His Honour K. St.C. BEST: The Honourable Member for St. Philip North understands that quotation, because I reminded him on many occasions, that is why he sought the good advice of the Cabinet of Barbados, to work speedily to ensure that the lease arrangement is made possible. I have always advocated that instead of the Centre, it should be the Barbados Community College, named after Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, because he fought the battle for a tertiary institution in this country, other than the Sixth Form Schools. That battle was fought to the very bitter end, despite the critics from all walks of

life in Barbados, but today we can see the benefits and fruits of his labour have grown to full maturity.

Sir, I must say that I recognised when the construction started, there was great criticism, and the famous talk about a white elephant. As a small farmer, I have never seen an elephant in Barbados, but the Barbados Labour Party supporters and its Members indicated that it is a white elephant, but today it is now hailed as the best thing that could ever happen in Barbados.

Sir, with all these glowing ideas and advice, it is not surprising that they want to behave as if they are still in Government, because they are familiar with consultants, and they believe that they can act as consultants for This Side. So they are all giving us advice on running the Government and the Centre. Sir, I want them to understand that we have the knowledge and the know-how on This Side. The technocrats and civil servants will assist us in guiding this country forward in these difficult times.

Sir, I am going to be very brief and say that it is a job well done by the Honourable Minister of Housing and Lands, and I fully support this Resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. J. D. PAUL: Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of the Resolution for the leasing of land to the Sherbourne Conference Centre and the renaming of the facility in honour of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford.

Sir, one of the things that should strike us when Sherbourne Conference Centre was being built, was the opportunity taken at that time, to redefine a product which was critical to the economic success of Barbados. At that time, Barbados did not have the kind of convention facilities which would have afforded it added attributes as a tourism destination.

It is the kind of foresight in terms of the direction, in which tourism generally in the world was going. It is the kind of foresight that allowed Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford to realise that if Barbados was to remain competitive, as far as tourism is concerned, there was a need for the kind of convention facilities that would have been able to attract additional visitors to the shores of Barbados, but for different reasons. Sir, that is why we have to applaud the construction of the then Sherbourne Conference Centre, by Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford. Sir, another matter we also have to recognise in terms of the facility itself - I believe that when there was a change of Government in 1994, the Barbados Labour Party Administration did not seize the

opportunity to, at least, continue and sharpen the vision that was then shown by Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford.

Sir, one of the things that I want to immediately go to, in terms of the whole question of redefining our tourism product, is the need to recognize, even at this time, that because we did not, at that point in time, seek to finish the complex in the manner it was originally envisioned. We were not, and still are not able, to take advantage of the benefits of International Conferences in its original arrangement. If we had done that, Barbados would have been even better positioned to enhance its tourism revenue.

Sir, I want to point to the fact that even now, persons attending conferences at Sherbourne Conference Centre, there is the lack of ready Internet access. I would recommend to the Minister responsible, the installation of the Y5 Zone facility. Sir, you should be able to communicate to your office or otherwise. There should be wireless access for persons who are attending conferences there, because that is part of the facilities found at most modern conference centres around the world today.

Sir, I would certainly want to encourage the Minister to ensure that we have that kind of facility in place at the now 'Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre.'

I also want to recognise that the facility has other attributes which the last Administration did not use to its full advantage. We need to, at least, highlight local artistes more and the work of local artistes at the Conference Centre. Therefore, I am hoping that when we visit Sherbourne Conference Centre, we would like to see more of the work of local artists in Barbados.

Sir, we had a situation during the last Administration, where they did not seek to decorate the facility in a manner that, at least, reflected and gave pride to the work of local artists in Barbados. That again is a deficiency on the part of the last Administration. In the future, as we move ahead, I am sure that the general public would notice the changes in that particular direction. Sir, with reference to the general use of the facility, we note that it is used for the promotion of our local productive sector. BIMEX happens to be an annual affair at the facility. I also want to encourage the management of the facility to broaden the horizon in other directions. I anticipate that there could be other functions, which were not originally conceived for the facility that can actually be included at this stage.

One of the actions that Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford attempted, was to redefine the Barbadian product in terms of the context of tourism. As I said before, one of the failures of the last Administration was, that they did not seek to capitalise on that particular vision.

Sir, you know my affinity for agriculture. It is not inconceivable that you could have agricultural shows at the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

3.00 p.m.

Sequence 24

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

House A6, Sequence 25, 3.00 p.m.

Mr. J. D. PAUL: Sir, those of you who would have attended many international shows around the world, would know that some of the biggest agricultural shows are actually held in indoor conference facilities. Sir, it speaks to the fact that the last Administration did not have a broad enough view of the role that the Sherbourne Conference facility could have served.

Sir, in that respect, I want to assure the Opposition that I would be trying to encourage the Government to have that broad view, which would allow the facility to be used with the kind of flexibility that would have been envisaged by Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford. I think that we cannot, but praise the efforts of a Statesman like Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, to have that facility established. I think that, generally, we have to agree that the renaming of the facility is appropriate at this time. Sir, again, it allows the Democratic Labour Party to continue that mandate that was originally set out by Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on this matter. I give my support to the Resolution and, hopefully, we could continue the good work that the Party has set out to do, Sir.

Thank you very much, Sir.

Asides.

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

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise to lend my voice to this Resolution to lease the lands at Sherbourne to the Sherbourne Conference Centre, and to make a couple of comments in respect of the renaming of that facility, as "The Lloyd Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre."

Mr. Speaker, Sir Lloyd has made a significant contribution to the development of the education and the cultural environment in Barbados. Indeed, I would want to join with my colleague from St. James North and as you know Sir Lloyd is a St. James man as well as both my colleague and myself. I think it is important - being very

parochial - that we recognise that contribution of a great St. James man.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that when we speak in relation to Sherbourne, we also need to take into consideration, the environment at the time of the construction of that facility. Sir, as some Honourable Members have already alluded to, the development of conference facilities in the early 1990s, was indeed lacking in Barbados, and the development of the Sherbourne Conference Centre addresses that need. Indeed, the whole development of the International Business sector was a response to that facility. Sir, that facility influenced and facilitated the development of our International Business Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the conference facilities in influencing that sector, would have contributed substantially to the earning of foreign exchange in our country. Sir, you know the need for us to ensure that in our development, we do not have a situation where our eggs are all in one basket.

The development of these facilities has, therefore, assisted us in diversifying our tourism product, as we knew it in the early 1990s. I think that alone makes this facility very significant. Sir, one of my concerns is the whole financial status of the Barbados Conference Centre, the company to which the lease has been afforded.

Mr. Speaker, despite the comments made by the Honourable Member for St. Joseph, that Company, as the Minister of Tourism had alluded to earlier, has been incurring substantial losses. Indeed, at the end of 2006, I believe the accumulated losses were in excess of \$5 million, despite an annual subsidy of \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million each year from the Government. Therefore, you can understand that over the period of that 10 years, the amount of that grant, would have been very significant. Mr. Speaker, I believe that, as I said, the whole financial status of the facility is of concern. Sir, looking at the marketing strategy over the years, one would have noticed that approximately \$190 000 has been spent on marketing almost annually. I believe that this is one of the reasons the Centre has not been successful in terms of its finances. Sir, this demonstrates that each year, we have not made any serious effort to market the Centre. Mr. Speaker, certainly listening to the Minister of Tourism earlier, I believe that substantial plans are in place to market and promote the Lloyd Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre at Sherbourne. Sir, the whole development of conference facilities, we have noticed in recent years under the Administration of the past Government, that a lot of the focus, in terms of our hotel plant, has been towards the condominiums and the lack of development of major hotel properties. Obviously, the facilities at Sherbourne Conference Centre as we try to develop our tourism plant, and try to chart the way forward for tourism within the 21st

Century under this Democratic Labour Party Government, the facilities at Sherbourne Centre would need to be further expanded to facilitate the development of our hotel plant. Therefore, this is certainly one of the legacies of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford to which Barbadians of all fields in the business sector, as well as the social and cultural sectors would have benefitted, and would certainly benefit in the future, in respect of our development. Sir, with those brief remarks, I would like to support this Resolution and encourage those on That Side that, rather than trying to be distracting, to support this Resolution. I thank you, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. Michael South. House A6, Sequence 25, 3.10 p.m. Tuesday, April 22, 2008 Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a very brief intervention in this debate. I do so because I have sat and listened to some of the revisionists on the Other Side of this House. Sir, I am aware that whenever a revisionist speaks, especially without challenge, sooner or later their version of events will metamorphose into truths and with the passage of time, will become respected history. Mr. Speaker, the Sherbourne Conference Centre, which is the subject matter of this debate and this Resolution, was built by the Democratic Labour Party in Government in the early 1990s. It was hastened to virtual completion in order to accommodate a large United Nations Conference for Small Island Developing States here in Barbados. At the time when it was being constructed, the Government of the day was the target of unsparing vilification by members of the Barbados Labour Party. That vilification took place both in this Chamber, and outside of it. The Government was accused of wasting taxpayers' money and the Sherbourne Conference Centre itself was christened on national television in a budget debate as a 'museum of madness.' Sir, the Government of the day never got any support from the then Opposition Barbados Labour Party, on the issue of the building of a modern conference facility to accommodate the expanding tourist sector, and the vision of the Government, that conference tourism was right for introduction into our tourist product. The passage of time has now vindicated the decision the Democratic Labour Party made in the early 1990s. Some of the same voices, or the descendants of some of the same voices that have been critical of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, are now changing their tune and trying to give the impression that they always supported it, and even if they did not support it, that they did not support it because they did not know what purpose it was about to serve. Mr. Speaker, it was always known that Sherbourne would have been a Conference Centre. It was always known that it was also supposed to be an examination centre and it was always known that it was supposed to provide facilities for a youth orchestra and other kinds of youth activities to minister to the requirements of our optimistic and forward-looking young people. It was always intended to be a multi-purpose facility. That was always made very clear. Today, we heard

from the Honourable Member for St. Joseph, the Honourable Deputy Leader of the Opposition, that they never knew what purpose Sherbourne was supposed to serve and that when they came into Government, they had to try and find a purpose for it. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. It is not without significance that today we are discussing Sherbourne in the way in which we are discussing it, because as has been wisely and correctly observed by the Honourable Member for St. James North, Sherbourne is located on the very spot which previously housed Barbados' first Community College, and thereby hangs a tale because the Government of the day in 1968/69, when the Barbados Community College was going to be established on the same spot, was the target of unsparing vilification from the same people who criticised Sherbourne. The Honourable Member for Christ Church South is quite right, that as a result of the resistance of spokes-persons for the Barbados Labour Party in 1969, the longest Teachers' strike ever to have taken place in Barbados took place as a result of events surrounding the establishment of the Barbados Community College. Those of us who were doing "O" levels around that time had to do without teaching in the period leading up to our examinations, because there were elements in the profession, and in the Barbados Labour Party, implacably opposed to the establishment of a Barbados Community College or a sixth form facility as it became known. Mr. Speaker, that location was also steep in history for another reason, because it is generally forgotten that after the collapse of the West Indies Federation in 1962, negotiations for a new federation of the 'Little Eight', led by Barbados, took place at the Sherbourne Conference Centre as well. Mr. Speaker, if I am not mistaken, I think the negotiations started there, and if I am not equally mistaken, I think they ended there, because I think it was at Sherbourne that the then Premier of Barbados, made his famous statement that he had despaired of the then Premier of St. Lucia, understanding the distinction between a Federal State and a Unitary State, and that therefore, he was going to end those negotiations and have Barbados proceed to independence alone. Sir, Sherbourne is the locus of much local history. I therefore am very pleased today to be associated with this Debate as part of a government that has had so much to do with what has gone on at Sherbourne over the years. The Minister of Housing and Lands, the Honourable Member for St. Philip North, is to be congratulated for the promptitude and the dispatch with which he has brought this matter before this Chamber, because the Barbados Conference Services Limited has been fighting an uphill battle for survival, ever since its establishment. The indolence and the acquiescence of the previous Government over the last 14 years made that Government deaf to the cries and the litanies of the Barbados Conference Services Limited. It was not until August last year, that Government sat to look at the fate and at the dim prospects of the Barbados Conference Services Limited and decided to take any action on it. Mr.

Speaker, for them to come in here and boast that the Resolution that we are discussing today had its genesis in the previous Barbados Labour Party is true, because the Cabinet did discuss it around November last year, but it discussed it in November last year after 13 years of neglect and abandonment of the proper management of the Sherbourne Conference Centre. Therefore, we do not accept the revisionism which has been coming from That Side today, and the attempts to >respectablise= themselves, if I may coin a word, by trying to place a version of events at Sherbourne that would portray them in a positive light. Sherbourne is also to be associated with the vision of the then Prime Minister of Barbados, the Right Honourable Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, later to become Sir Lloyd Sandiford. House A6 Sequence 26 3.20 p.m. Tuesday, April 22, 2008 Continuation of the Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Speaker, the resistance to the Sherbourne Conference Centre in the period leading up to the conference in 1993, was so determined, that lesser men would have wilted under the pressure, but Erskine Sandiford stuck his ground, because he had a vision for Barbados. Sir, he understood the directions in which the tourism industry was going. He also understood the aspirations and ideals of young people in Barbados. Therefore, he stuck his neck out and kept his hands to the plough, in terms of bringing that conference centre to some form of completion. Sir, it is not yet completed, because of the catastrophic events that occurred in this Honourable Chamber in June, 1994, that brought a premature end to the Government at the time.

Mr. Speaker, as the Honourable Member for St. Michael Central has said, 13 years of spite succeeded the fall of the last Democratic Labour Party and as a result, nothing else was done to the Sherbourne Conference Centre, although for not one day in the life of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, has it not been used. It has been used every day of every week, since it was formally opened and the Government of Barbados Labour Party, for 13 years because they did not build it, determined that they were not going to do anything about it.

Sir, jokes were made by former Members of this Honourable Chamber, on platforms and in this Honourable Chamber, about its unfinished state, about the exposed back-side of the Sherbourne Conference Centre. These things were said and done by the Barbados Labour Party, and today it now falls back into the laps of this Democratic Labour Party Government to bring the Sherbourne Conference Centre to a respectable kind of completion.

Sir, this Government is committed to that objective, because we think, not only does the tourism industry deserve it, but also the young people of Barbados deserve what is contemplated by a finished conference centre. Mr. Speaker, it is in that context, that I want to address the issue of the renaming of the Sherbourne Conference Centre after Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford.

Sir, Sir Lloyd, as a result of the Barbados Labour Party's affliction with guilt. I heard this talk about 'it is we who honoured him' but after reviling him and ridiculing him in public, as much as the Barbados Labour Party did between 1987 and in 1994, guilt struck them and they felt they had to try to redeem themselves and expiate their wrong-doings by Knighting him, although, of course, Lloyd Erskine Sandiford deserves the Knighthood which he got.

Sir, I do not think that he accepted the knighthood on the understanding that his enemies would be walking around the place boasting that they gave it to him. He has made a massive, substantial and wise contribution to the politics and to the public life of Barbados and he deserves the recognition he got.

Mr. Speaker, I have always said that when you have served in politics as long as Erskine Sandiford has done, and you could leave politics with your reputation intact, that is an achievement of which one should be proud. I have said elsewhere, talking about the same Erskine Sandiford, that some years ago at Harvard University, an American Senator by the name of Allan Simpson, who I think was the Senator from Wyoming, was introducing the then President Gerald Ford, to deliver a lecture at Harvard. Sir, Allan Simpson said something that stuck with me from then until now. He said: "In politics, if you have integrity, nothing else matters, but if you do not have integrity, nothing else matters either."

Mr. Speaker, it helps, that today in discussing the contributions of Erskine Sandiford to Barbados= politics, that I can press that quotation into service. Sir, whatever else could be said about Erskine Sandiford in the politics of Barbados between 1967, when he was appointed Minister of Education from the Senate, and the time he left politics? I have never once ever heard anybody in this country impute dishonesty or corruption to him.

Sir, that is enough to recommend him to me. That is why I feel that this Government has done the very right thing to rename the Sherbourne Conference Centre after him. I think he deserves to be immortalised in the public life of Barbados. I think he was a sterling example to our youth. I think he was a model of humility in this society, for having left the lofty office of Prime Minister. He did not think it was beneath his dignity to go back to the Barbados Community College and teach the sons and daughters of working-class persons in this country. Therefore, I stand four-square behind the Minister of Housing in this matter, and I am proud to be part of a government that has thought it wise to honour Sir Lloyd in this way.

Mr. Speaker, as to the future of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, the Democratic Labour Party is

committed to its completion and also committed to its development. What we heard from the Minister of Tourism today does not make for happy recital, that the Barbados Conference Service Limited has been registering the losses that it has been registering over a sustained period of time, in spite of the subventions which it has been getting. I am pleased and was pleased to hear from the Minister that plans are afoot to turn that situation around and to make the Barbados Conference Service Limited a viable entity. Therefore, this step of giving that company a 25-year lease, so that it could plan its future with a certain amount of certainty is, in my view, a progressive one, and I hope that it would yield the dividends which it is intended to yield.

Mr. Speaker, we hear the 'naysayers', the prophets and prophetesses of doom from the Other Side now saying to wait until next year, because they are hoping that this initiative would fail. Sir, I do not know why anybody would hope and pray that a company in which the Government is the only shareholder would have nothing of positive value to report to Barbadians in one year=s time.

Sir, I think I need to divert here to say this, I know that Honourable Members on the Other Side did not expect to be seated where they are in this Honourable Chamber today. I know they had become so "cock-sure", so self-righteous and so arrogantly self-opinionated, that they believed their obsessions were the obsessions of the people of Barbados as well.

Mr. Speaker, it is time that they realise that the people have spoken, that they are the Opposition and will be the Opposition for as long as the people intend them to be the Opposition. They need to take an example from the Democratic Labour Party. When we were in Opposition, we accepted the verdict of the people. Sir, we did not murmur, complain, fret nor frown.

3.30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Hon. F. J. STUART: We accepted the verdict of the people, because the Democratic Labour Party is a democratic organisation, not only "democratic" spelt with a capital AD@, but we are also democratic spelt with a common Ad@. Sir, we accept the verdict of the people and we invite you to do the same. This constant fretting and talking about how foolish the people are, that they made a big mistake and all this kind of thing, this does not become the oldest political Party in Barbados.

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House when he said that the Barbados Labour Party=s Members on This Side have said that people are foolish. It is far from anything that we have ever said. We have always said in

this Honourable Chamber and outside of this Chamber that the people of Barbados have spoken and we respect what they have done. We have also congratulated the Government for its achievement in winning at the poll. Therefore, I think it is unreasonable to say that this group of Members here have been out there saying that the people are foolish. I would wish for that to be corrected and withdrawn from the records.

Hon. F. J. STUART: I have heard the Honourable Member for St. Thomas and I have never accused her of so saying. I have never accused her of anything. I have accused her of grumbling. She represents the grumbling component of my statement, not the saying that the people are foolish. The one who said the people are foolish is the one who got defeated in St. Philip South. In fact, he said that the people are vicious, not foolish, so the Honourable Member for St. Thomas can speak for herself. At every Sitting of this Chamber, since Parliament resumed, she has been in here mumbling, stumbling, fumbling and grumbling. That is what I attribute to here, but so far....

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading the House if he continues to go down that road.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, that is not my recollection of what he said.

Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Speaker, if the Honourable Member for St. Thomas now repents, if she now feels ashamed of the behavior of her Party and she wants to issue a recantation on the part of the Party, I have no problem with that. I am very glad that what I have said here today has awakened her, and that she now feels that we can get on with the people=s business, and that she no longer wishes that Barbados Conference Services Limited will be a failure, and that next year we will have nothing positive to report. Sir, I am happy about that.

Mr. Speaker, I fully identify myself with the intent of this Resolution. It has my full support. I wish the Barbados Conference Services well. I hope that the granting of this very long lease with an option to renew for a similar period at its end, will serve the purposes which Barbados Conference Services Limited would like it to serve, and that the story of Sherbourne and the Barbados Conference Services Limited can be turned around as a result of the initiative of the Honourable Member for St. Philip North, the Ministry of Housing and Lands, and that we can all continue to aspire to the creation of a better Barbados, a just society in which each man, each woman, each boy and each girl, can find his or her place and can realise his or her fullest potential.

Mr. Speaker, I am obliged to you.

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

Hon. M. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my concluding remarks to this Resolution.

First, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all those Honourable Members who contributed to this debate, the Honourable Members from This Side and Honourable Members from the Other Side.

Sir, I was a little disappointed that the Honourable Member for St. Thomas did not speak in this debate. I believe that the Honourable Member for St. Thomas, in silence, agreed with the Resolution and also agreed with the renaming of the Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the Other Side tried to make the point that the Administration at the time had no clear idea, and I believe that in the process of time of the debate, that matter was laid to rest, because all Honourable Members on This Side spoke to the fact that the Administration at the time had a clear vision for the usage of the facility.

Mr. Speaker, I do recall the Honourable Member for St. Joseph in his contribution stating that their Administration planted the seed, that the seed was planted by that Administration, and that we are not benefitting from that seed planting. Sir, the stark reality is that the Democratic Labour Party planted the seed and the fact that they did not move in a swift manner to bring this lease to Parliament, so that there would be clear ownership arrangement, tells me that the Administration at the time was like Rick Van Wrinkle, fast asleep.

Mr. Speaker, I do recall too the contribution made by the Honourable Member for St. Michael North. The Honourable Member for St. Michael North directly congratulated the Honourable Member from St. Michael South Central, because he was excited by the plan that the Minister of Tourism is putting in place for the utilisation of the Centre. In fact, he was so surprised that to me, it was an indirect attack on the former Minister of Tourism, because he was saying that it should have been done by the former Minister of Tourism and so, he was so excited by the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central, that here is now a government with a developmental plan, a Strategic Plan for the utilisation of Sherbourne Conference Centre.

Sir, again, we want to thank the Honourable Member for St. Michael North for associating himself with This Side for the vision and the plan that we have for Sherbourne Conference Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record that the vision that Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford had for the

Sherbourne Centre clearly manifested on April 25, to May 6, 1994, when Barbados successfully hosted the first full major united conference in relation to Small Island Developing States at Sherbourne Centre. It was a full major conference held at the Sherbourne Conference Centre between the dates April 25 to May 6, 1994. Again, we must applaud Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford for having the vision.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Honourable Members on the Other Side, as they rightly said, criticised the idea of the construction of the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

3.40 p.m.

Sequence 28

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Hon. M. A. LASHLEY: They criticised it by stating that it was a waste of taxpayers' money. Again I reiterate, the Honourable Members on That Side also called it a "white elephant". Sir, Honourable Members on This Side had to point out to Members on This Side that they made full use of the Sherbourne Conference Centre. In fact, the former Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown was the first person to place a ministry in the Sherbourne Conference Centre.

Sir, the fact is, for over 14 years, only in August 2007, they rushed to decide that there must be some clear defined ownership. It took us three months to bring the Resolution, and to recognise the importance of placing a lease to ensure that the duties and responsibility of the lessor or lessee, in relation to this Centre, are clearly defined.

Sir, I will reiterate the fact, that this is a proud moment for this Administration, and a day that will always be remembered in this Parliament, because we recognised a true son of the soil, a man of integrity, as outlined and stated by the Honourable Member for St. Michael South, a man of decency.

Sir, Honourable Members of Both Sides throughout the debate, had no difficulty in associating with the fact that we have made a proposal to the Board to rename the Sherbourne Conference Centre The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre."

Sir, in closing, with these few remarks I beg that this Resolution do now pass.

Hon. R. L. SEALY: I beg to second that, Sir.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. R. D. JONES: Sir, I beg to move that this Honourable House be adjourned until April 29, 2008, at 10.00 a.m.

Hon. R. L. SEALY: I beg to second that.

The question that the House be adjourned until April 29, 2008, was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER adjourned the House accordingly.

3.43 p.m.

Sequence 29

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THOMPSON, Hon. D. J. H. (St. John)
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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 and date. The convening sentence in the source gives the date as Tuesday, February 26, 2008, but the heading and file name give Tuesday, April 22, 2008, which is used. Please confirm.

Q2. Masthead. The session is not stated in the source, so no session line is printed.

Q3. Dates in the text. The source gives ‘Tuesday, March 17, 2008’ (17 March 2008 was a Monday). The weekday and date do not agree; printed as in the source.

Q4. Opening. The convening sentence is incomplete in the source; it begins ‘met at 10.15 a.m.’ without ‘Pursuant to the adjournment, the House of Assembly’. Printed as in the source.

Q5. Minutes. Hon. R. D. Jones is shown both moving and seconding the confirmation of the Minutes. Printed as in the source.

Q6. Order No. 3, Hon. M. A. Lashley. Part of the Minister’s opening speech, from ‘The term of the lease shall be for a period of 25 years’ to the end of his speech, stands under the label ‘Mr. Speaker’. Printed as in the source.

Q7. Order No. 3, Hon. F. J. Stuart. Hon. F. J. Stuart’s speech, together with the take-slip ‘House A6, Sequence 25, 3.10 p.m. Tuesday, April 22, 2008’, is run into Mr. Speaker’s call ‘The Honourable Member for St. Michael South.’, so about 2,280 words of Mr. Stuart’s speech appear under Mr. Speaker’s label. Printed as in the source.

Q8. Order No. 3, heading and lessee. The heading spells ‘RESOLUTION’ with a zero. The Minister names the lessee once as ‘Barbados Conference Centre Limited’; the heading and the rest of the debate give Barbados Conference Services Limited. Printed as in the source.

Q9. Order No. 3, Hon. M. A. Lashley’s constituency. The Minister of Housing and Lands is called as ‘The Honourable Member for St. Philip South’ to open the debate and as ‘The Honourable Member for St. Philip North’ to wind up. Printed as in the source.

Q10. Apostrophes. Several apostrophes appear as ‘=’ in the source (for example ‘Needham=s Point’, ‘taxpayers= money’, ‘Barbados Labour Party=s’). Printed as in the source.

DEBATE SUMMARY

(Editorial summary — not part of the record.)

The House of Assembly met on Tuesday, 22nd April, 2008 at 10.15 a.m., with Mr. Speaker in the Chair; prayers were taken by Reverend Canon Ivan Harewood. The Minutes of 17th March were confirmed, and the Speaker reported receipt of the Accountant-General’s Financial Statements for July and August 2007, welcomed Senator Miss Sabina A. Williams of the Commonwealth of Dominica, and welcomed back the Member for St. James North. Papers were laid by Hon. F. J. Stuart (including the Representation of the People (Expenses) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2008 and the 2006 Annual Report of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation), by Hon. R. D. Jones on behalf of the Acting Minister of Finance, Dr. the Hon. D. C. Estwick, and by Hon. R. L. Sealy (the Needham’s Point accounts for 2005 and 2006). The Nurses Bill, 2008 and the Barbados Water Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2008 were read a first time.

The only Order was Order No. 3, the Resolution to approve the lease under section 5 of the Crown Lands (Vesting and Disposal) Act to Barbados Conference Services Limited of 27 769 square metres of Crown land with the Sherbourne Conference Centre, Two Mile Hill, St. Michael. The Minister of Housing and Lands, Hon. M. A. Lashley, explained that the lease would run for 25 years with an option to renew for 25 more, at a rent of \$100 a year reviewable every five years, the lessee bearing maintenance and outgoings and the Crown the property insurance; the terms had been agreed by the previous Cabinet on 15th November, 2007. He recalled that the Centre had once been called a ‘white elephant’ and announced that Cabinet was proposing that it be renamed ‘The Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Cultural Centre’.

For the Opposition, Mr. G. A. Clarke supported the lease, calling the \$100 rent a peppercorn for a Government company, and urged the Minister to bring other leases; Mr. D. St. E. Kellman supported it but argued that names could be changed without destroying history; and Mr. D. D. Marshall said he had supported the terms as a member of the previous Cabinet. Hon. R. L. Sealy argued that the Centre should minimise its losses, and on a point of elucidation said that he had gone back to 1999, when the losses were \$300 000. Mr. R. C. Eastmond spoke of the

regularisation of Government's occupation of land, and Hon. P. M. T. Todd of the redevelopment of Bridgetown, drawing points of order from Mr. Eastmond, Mr. Clarke and Mr. Marshall. Mr. R. St. C. Toppin said it was not unusual for a company to make losses in its early years, and Mr. S. A. Lashley spoke of the Centre's effect on the surrounding community; the Speaker ruled that a Member could not ascribe a motive to another.

After the suspension until 1.30 p.m., Hon. J. D. E. Boyce accepted the Opposition's challenge to report in a year on the company's progress, and Hon. R. D. Jones,

Hon. S. D. Blackett, Dr. the Hon. D. S. Lowe, His Honour K. St. C. Best, Mr. J. D. Paul and Hon. E. G. Hutson supported the lease and the renaming in honour of Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford. Hon. F. J. Stuart criticised the 'revisionists' on the Other Side, drawing points of order from Miss C. Y. Forde. Mr. Lashley wound up and the Resolution was agreed to without division.

On the motion of Hon. R. D. Jones, seconded by Hon. R. L. Sealy, the House was adjourned until 29th April, 2008 at 10.00 a.m.