
THE

House of Assembly Debates

(UNOFFICIAL REPORT)

SECOND SESSION 2008 – 2013

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Friday, February 13, 2009

Pursuant to the adjournment, the House of Assembly met at 10.15 a.m. on Friday,

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.)

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON, LL.B (Hons.) Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Investment, Labour, Civil Service and Energy)

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.

Mr. H. F. LASHLEY

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

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY, Q.C., LL.B. (Leader of the Opposition)

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, B.Sc., M.B.,B.S. (Minister of Economic Affairs and Empowerment, Innovation, Trade, Industry and Commerce)

Mr. 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, B.Sc., M.B.A. (Minister of Tourism)

Hon. F. J. STUART, B.A., LL.M. (Deputy Prime Minister, Attorney-General and Minister of Home Affairs)

Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE, M.Sc. . Eng.) (Minister of Transport and Works)

Hon. E. G. HUTSON, F.C.C.A., C.A.(Minister of International Business and International Transport)

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 The Environment, Water Resources and Drainage)

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, Education and Human Resource Development)

Hon. D. O'N. INNIS, M.B.A., B.Sc. (Minister of Health)

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER, M.Sc., B.A. (Minister of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment and Rural and Urban Development)

Dr. the Hon. E. R. BYER-SUCKOO, M.B.,B.S. (Minister of Family, Youth Affairs and Sports)

Prayers were taken by Reverend Canon Ivan Harewood.

Mr. SPEAKER: This House is now in session.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I am not in receipt of any Minutes at this stage, so I will accept a formal motion that the Minutes for the last Sitting be deferred.

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that those Minutes be deferred until a subsequent Sitting.

Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question that the Minutes from our last Sitting be deferred was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Standing Orders Nos. 6,8,16,18,20,42(5),43 and 44 be suspended for the remainder of this day's Sitting.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 4 – NATIONAL ASSISTANCE (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2009

9.50 a.m.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Speaker, allow me to introduce for discussion in this Honourable House, a relatively simple amendment to the existing National Assistance Board Act, which seeks to give a level of flexibility and some degree of certainty to the functions of the Board, as set out in the original Act and, certainly, as now set out in this Amendment Bill.

As you no doubt would be aware, Barbados is one of the few countries in the world and, certainly, in this part of the world, that offers a Home Help Service. Indeed, it is one of the things that sets us apart from many of our contemporaries as a country and which, I believe, in many respects has brought Barbados much acclaim as a nation that looks after its elderly and those citizens who are in the matured years of their lives.

Sir, it is something that we should all be proud of, because when this service was first introduced in the early 1980s, it was envisaged that we would offer a quality service for those persons who did not require hospitalisation or institutionalisation, in terms of being placed in a citizen's home or in such type institution, as we may have.

Indeed, Sir, when the system was introduced and the service was first contemplated, we as a nation started to address, not only the issues of ageing, but the full gamut of gerontological intervention pertaining to how we treat the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, it really is an art of practice in terms of the treatment of our seniors that involves, not just issues pertaining to health care, even though those are very important, but about the welfare of those persons who are in their senior years.

Sir, there are many of us in here who would hope at some point in time to be able to live long enough. You know it is said in the Bible that you are given three score

years and ten, and that person who gets four score years had, in fact, enjoyed a luxury, but because of the living standards we have, and because Barbados has been able to build up in this Nation, a comprehensive system of social care, a comprehensive system of development that has placed us very high on the United Nations Human Development Index. We now see persons living beyond and, indeed, way beyond in some instances, that which has been prescribed in the good book.

Indeed, I say with some level of pride that my Constituency, St. Michael North West had the largest number of centenarians. I would say that you can check the exact figures but in December when the Committee on the Aged, which is also in the Ministry for which I have responsibility, was doing the hampers to be given out to those persons who are centenarians for Christmas, or as one radio commentator called them, quite incorrectly, "centurions", the Committee members motioned to me that, in fact, St. Michael North West had the largest number of centenarians in the country.

In fact, only three weeks ago, I was in Free Hill celebrating with one and there is another one who is going to come later this month, God willing. Therefore, I know very well that we do have persons who have been able to live relatively strong and good lives. When we had envisaged putting a Home Help Service in place, the concept was that these are persons who do not require institutionalisation, but these are persons that can be assisted in the comfort of their own environment, in their own homes at the level of intervention by State assisted assistance, to be able to help them with the everyday chores of life, such as cooking, washing and cleaning, because their bodies, even though their minds are still quite agile and flexible, sometimes tire under the weight of the daily chores.

The State wanted to go in their homes and treat to those issues, but to create a wholesome environment within which those elderly persons can continue to be productive members of their own communities, in their own households and, generally, to be in the country.

Sir, some people feel that unless you are out there with a hammer and a saw, or the shovel and a peck, that you cannot be productive. They believe that unless you get into a car and drive down to an office and sit for five or six hours, that you really cannot be productive. This is not true.

Indeed, a lady visited me last night at my Constituency office, when I was doing my clinic somewhere forward of 10:00 o'clock, and said to me that I like working with elderly people - and it is a point that I am going to come to later - because they give you such good advice.

She also said that when she went to work with one of her clients - because she works with people in private residences - the lady said to her on her first day of working: "Young lady, when you get your first set of money, buy something that you can touch, buy something that you can value and it would last you for the rest of your life. Do not go throwing your money away".

Sir, that is very good productive advice that she accumulated, and she said that the first set of money she got, she went and paid down on a piece of land and she swears that today, she would not be where she is, were not for that advice. Therefore, elderly people have a lot to offer. Indeed, their minds are a store treasure of many of the things that were good about this society and can be good again, which we could utilise. Therefore, you are not only treating them within the confines and the environs of their own homes, but you are allowing them the opportunity to interact.

This is why the Honourable Member for St. George South ought to be congratulated for working with the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East in relation to the Youth Mentorship Programme with the elderly.

Sir, on the last occasion that we were here, it attracted some criticism that, I think, was a bit unfair, not to mention all inaccurate and a little disingenuous. Frankly, we tend to nick-pick about little things here and there in programmes, but it is the overall intent.

Mr. Speaker, I went out around at Christmas time and helped the young people. Of course, I had to show the youngsters how to paint, because even with water paint using a roller, there is a skill. Sir, it is that type of programme that defines the character of our society.

10.00 a.m.

Sir, when successive Governments started and maintained the process of the Home Help Service, it was not just to employ people, but to provide a valuable service for our elderly citizens. Mr. Speaker, that system has grown tremendously over the years. We are now treating to 1 075 clients in the Home Help Service. Indeed, it grows every month.

Sir, because of our high standard of living, our quality health care and our social welfare system, persons are living longer, so we are getting more persons coming on to the programme than we are getting going off, but that is a good thing. However, that places a burden not only on the finances of the Ministry and the Government, but equally on the persons designated to serve on the Board of the National Assistance Board.

Sir, it is for this reason that we are today doing a simple amendment in the context of how the Law goes. I am not a Lawyer, but Law can get very complicated for those who want to make it complicated. Sir, this is a simple amendment to increase the numbers on the Board from seven to nine persons.

Sir, because of the complexity of the issues faced by the Board, the amount of issues they have to deal with and the work-load of the agency itself, the seven members were finding it extremely difficult to divide themselves up into committees, big enough to handle the work. This is something that comes forward from the previous Administration to whom I would have a word very shortly, but it was recognised that we needed more.

The previous Administration had recommended that the Board be increased by one, but we felt that increasing it by one was a bit too minuscule and would, in fact, create a situation where you would have even numbers on the Board and no casting vote. Therefore, we asked that it be increased by one more so that you go to nine and have an odd number and, therefore, this can satisfy the work of the Board.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a point in relation to what we have done in this respect. I make this point very seriously. This is a service for which we have become proud, justifiably so, for which we have become accustomed, justifiably so, and for which our seniors expect, justifiably so, having made their contribution to this society.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make two points in relation to this. The first point is slightly related, but goes into the general area of welfare. The previous Government in its wisdom, or lack therefore, made adjustments to the National Insurance Act that disallowed certain persons, who it is said have not made contributions to the fund, from getting an old-aged pension.

Mr. Speaker, let me put it this way. It has grown up in Barbados the practice that persons who have not contributed... Mr. Speaker, in the sense of the contributory nature of National Insurance, I could understand why one would want to say that persons who have not contributed should not draw. However, when you say one thing or you do one thing, you have to do another.

Sir, there are always implications to those decisions. The implication that has arisen in this particular respect is that there are a number of senior persons in Barbados who have never worked, or who worked, and persons did not pay contributions for them, or if they were self-employed, they did not make the contributions themselves which they should have made.

Mr. Speaker, it is all right, good and easy, for those of us who have provisions of pension plans and other things to speak, but we still have to deal with the fact, that a lot of those persons out there who the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East and myself see every Wednesday at the Urban Development Commission, close to 60 people...

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: I see some people from St. Thomas and I treat to their issues. I see these persons and I speak with them.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is that some of those persons do not have access to pensions and they are left there to suffer. Somebody says: "Let them go to the Welfare Department", but I am not sure that is really the appropriate thing to do. I am not sure that system is treating properly to those persons, and as a result, several of those persons are falling out of the net. They would turn up at Constituency offices, they would turn up at different places and you would give them assistance, but that is neither sustainable nor appropriate.

Sir, we as a country that pride ourselves on caring, on development and on the treatment of the proper relations of our elderly persons, have to address this issue sooner rather than later. Given the fact that, as I said, our population is ageing, people are living longer, we cannot have people over 65 years of age whose issues are not being treated, scrambling to make ends meet in this ultra-competitive world economy or even in this domestic economy.

Mr. Speaker, I say this very seriously as a Member of Parliament, but really as a human being. I know that we agree in the Democratic Labour Party's Manifesto to address this issue. I think a time is going to come when both parties are going to have to sit, may be in a committee of Parliament or whatever, and come to a decision on how we treat to this issue. Sir, regardless of whether or not our colleagues join us, the Democratic Labour Party is going to push ahead with dealing with that matter.

Mr. Speaker, the second point relates to the issue of service. Sir, given that we pride ourselves on being a service economy, I do not believe that any of us in Barbados needs to go and get an Oxford Dictionary to define service. We know what service means in Barbados. We do not need anybody to define service for us, at least we should not.

Sir, even though I laud the public servants who designed the NISE Programme, I really, at a philosophical level, have some issues with it, because I do not feel that anybody should have to tell you how to be nice. If you

cannot be taught to be nice by your parents when you are small, and you have to wait until you become 30 or 40 years old for somebody to tell you to smile, and be nice, and to answer a phone and say hello, how you are doing, good morning, you have reached this Department, you really want a lash, to be honest. Mr. Speaker, in the instance that what we expect to happen in a society is not happening, we have to make those interventions.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make another point. Sir, it has grown up in this country, in this National Assistance Board and the Home Help Service, that two things seem to be creeping into that process. The first is bad service, and second is the extraordinary ability of some members of the staff to be not so nice to those persons they are required to treat.

Sir, in many instances, it comes from bad attitudes. There are some wonderful and outstanding home helpers who go out there, who work hard, who go beyond the call of duty and who do what they have to do, and I want to congratulate them for their work.

10.10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage them and to let them know that this Democratic Labour Party will give them every possible support. Sir, I want to let them know that as in every bunch, there are one or two bad apples who believe it is their purpose in life and their mission on earth to corrupt. Sir, when I say corrupt, I do not mean corrupt in the legalistic sense, I mean corrupt as in turning bad. They believe it is their duty to invest within this service some bad attitudes.

Sir, I will tell you where some of it came from, because I blame them in one part and I blame the previous Administration on the other part. Sir, I would even go as far as to say previous Administrations for some of the problems which we are having in this regard, but I know a lot of it grew up under the last Board.

Mr. Speaker, we had a situation where, as the service expanded, there was a requirement to get additional workers, where the previous Board, under the previous Administration, which was headed, in my view, by some persons who ought not to have been heading it, but that was their decision - he certainly was not elected - brought on a number of persons - what is called temporary relief workers - to work in that Home Help Programme.

Sir, if you go through the list of the 30 or 40 persons who were brought on as temporary relief workers, all within the space of about one year, that year being 2007, an election year, you would see a lot of those persons could be distinguished only by their lack of qualifications, or by their lack of training.

Sir, sometimes you hire a person who is untrained or who has no qualification for the post. Sir, there is, in fact, proper certification through course work in Care of the Elderly, which has been set up by the previous Administration at the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic.

Sir, we know there are mechanisms for persons to have training, and taking care of the elderly is a skill. It is not something where you can simply walk in off the road, even though you might have had to do it in your own home, but you learn that with practice. Sir, there are some persons who may be trainable and may be interested in learning.

Sir, we have a situation in this service where a number of persons were given the opportunity, as we would say in Barbadian parlance "getting a little pick" and rather than seeing to it that they get themselves properly trained, or that they build up the requisite skills, have come into that service to corrupt it with bad attitudes and bad service. Sir, the litany goes on where some of those persons are going into old people's homes and harassing them, where some of them are stealing money, I am told.

Mr. Speaker, only the other day, the Director of the National Assistance Board had to be called to one of the local polyclinics for some of these young persons who went there to get the various immunisations, Hepatitis B, and whatever shots. These persons created a furore at the polyclinic. Sir, when you get situations where complaints are made - and I know some elderly people can be a little anxious and will make complaints - some of these persons return to the homes of those old persons, only to carry them on in the roughest way and in some instances, we are told, allegedly, to abuse them.

Mr. Speaker, I think we can agree, on Both Sides, that this is unacceptable, particularly because the previous Government made no statutory requirement for these persons to receive a salary. In other words, these home helpers do not have established posts and, therefore we have to find money to pay these people, a lot of whom are on three-days-a-week jobs. I am saying that if these Home Helpers could get a little "pick" they should try to make it work. I am saying that they should be proud of themselves and proud of the institution for which they are working.

Mr. Speaker, I see some of these Home Helpers going to work, not in the uniform issued by the National Assistance Board, but in short skirts. I see some of them with 15 earrings in one ear, with nose ring, "hair do", etcetera. I saw a young lady going into a house, she had on the uniform, but her hair was not done and she had a comb sticking out at the top. Sir, I have told the Director and the Board that we have to clean this up. This is not good enough.

Over the years we have put together a fantastic service and we should not allow anybody, regardless of whether or not they come from country or town, whether or not they be B, D, E or F, to pull that service that Both Sides have worked so hard to build up over the years, a service that separates us from so many other countries in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the Board is going to have the responsibility at a policy level, as I have told them, to ensure that this system gets cleaned up.

There are a number of both young and matured people who have done the Care of the Elderly Programme, who have the qualification and experience, but who cannot get a job working at the National Assistance Board because there are no more jobs, yet there are persons working there, who have no qualifications, who are playing the fool. Mr. Speaker, as long as I am Minister, I will work with them, but I am telling them they have to change that attitude and raise that level of service, because we cannot afford for this good system to fall.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make those points and also to conclude by saying that very shortly we will be restructuring the entire service to make it more efficient, to ensure that we service both the countryside and urban areas, and that we have proper service provided to the elderly in Barbados.

Sir, equally, I want to say that in the next fiscal year, the Government of Barbados has taken the decision that we need to go back into the homes of our senior citizens and upgrade those homes.

Sir, I am sure that the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East will be happy to know that the long-held extension of "George" tenant will occur in the next financial year, and that we are going to create additional spaces in our Senior Citizens Homes, to ensure that we could accommodate more seniors in those places.

Sir, further, we are also going to ensure that we put additional rooms in that new complex, where we are going to go upstairs - and I will speak to that when we come to the Estimates - to ensure that we have at least between three to five spaces that we could hold for victims of fires, etcetera, because of the fact that we have been having a tremendous amount of problems in finding short-term spaces for persons when they are affected by such perils.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, in the entire process on the Care for the Elderly, there will be legislation on the Abuse of the Elderly. There will be a reformation of the entire service to make it modern and up-to-date, to ensure that we bring on the requisite skills in gerontology, to bring on nursing skills, so that persons in these homes can be treated properly. We will also be bringing in podiatrists to ensure that the elderly who have foot problems can be treated.

10.20 a.m.

We are going to reform this entire system within the next year to ensure that we bring it up to the highest possible standards that our small country could take it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask all members to join with us in this particular amendment to the Act, to ensure that we get the flexibility that we could function at this given time in the life of this obviously excellent programme, which we hope to continue to reach higher heights in the years to come.

Sir, I am obliged to you.

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

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

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. Thomas.

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, I would wish to indicate at the outset that in the light that the Honourable Member has expressed the need for the expansion of the Board from seven members to nine members, that as long as there will be efficiency and a high measure of accountability, we on this side would have absolutely no problem with it, but we believe that persons, who have the expertise in this same area of gerontology and social work, should be persons that would be there to provide proper advice for the Board and to be able to help us meet the needs of our people.

Mr. Speaker, I support many of the comments made by the Honourable Member and this is not a new position. I believe and I know for sure that Barbadians are living longer.

The Honourable Member spoke about the number of persons in his Constituency who are now centenarians. Sir, even though he might have the most, there are centenarians across the length and breadth of Barbados.

I believe that persons who would have made very outstanding contributions to the development of Barbados over the many years should, in their twilight years, be given the highest quality care to make them happy. We

acknowledge that many of them suffer from dementia, Alzheimers and different diseases that kick in, in the old age. Indeed, Alzheimers came even in the 1950s and, therefore, you could imagine the senior citizens that would definitely need care.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the Government of the day, in the early 1990s came up with the concept of the National Assistance Board and subsequently to that, the Home Help Scheme.

Sir, I would wish, before I forget, to say how pleased I am with the service offered over the years and to congratulate those persons working in the Civil Service, and more important, in the National Assistance Board.

Sir, it is no easy task to work with senior citizens, especially those whose memories are slipping. Sir, you feed them now, but five minutes after they say you have not given them anything to eat for the day. Therefore, the home help worker must feel uncomfortable knowing that she made sure they had eaten, but when the relative comes, the senior citizen says he has had nothing to eat. Sir, those persons recruited for these tasks should have a measure of compassion, understanding, care and love for humanity.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that as times goes by, we will be able to expand the service. Sir, if people are getting older, then there is need for us to put systems in place to look after their needs. Sir, I strongly support all those persons working in the Civil Service and congratulate them for their years of untiring service, sometimes without any gratitude at all, whether it be from the institution or families, who can sometimes do better.

Mr. Speaker, there is a kind of holistic approach, as you know, where those persons are recruited as home helpers, they plait and brush the hair of females and sometimes cut the hair of males. They also sweep and prepare meals but, Sir, it goes beyond that. They also minister to them, read to them and pray with them, which helps to put them on a different plane and, Sir, for me, that is most comforting.

Mr. Speaker, we know that some of them, when they are losing their memory, become so angry, sometimes they even hit the home helpers and so, it is a very arduous task, but we must tip our hats to them. Sir, many of us living in our homes with parents, grand parents, or relatives, or neighbours next door, who are getting down in years, get the real first-hand experience as to their changing moods and how they could treat a person, if they are not in a good mood at the time when you meet them. These people are doing an excellent job.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to put in a plug, at this time, for NGOs, other church groups and groups in

communities that also work with senior citizens. Indeed, there are some churches that have established their own homes where senior citizens go, not to live in the homes but they go on a daily basis. Sir, just as there are homes for babies, there are homes for the elderly, so that they could have an opportunity to talk with persons from their generation, sing and use their hands to repair craft and a number of activities take place.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that NGOs working in that area should be able to get some kind of subvention to help them to expand their numbers. Sir, as human beings, we like to have someone to talk to us, to make much of us and make us feel important.

Sir, especially now at this time of Valentines, we like people to say, "I love you". Therefore, I believe those institutions that are supporting the efforts of Government should be highly commended, because Government cannot do it all. Sir, we know that extremely well. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the project, like Meals on Wheels, which is done by the Salvation Army, that caters to citizens who cannot get home help assistance because of the large numbers that have made request, Sir, they too must be highly commended.

Sir, the Israel Lovell Foundation and the Pinelands group, have done meals-on-wheels that not only reaches senior citizens, but destitute people in communities, which at least makes sure they get a meal per day. Sir, I think that is highly commendable and a more holistic approach must be done with the Government agencies to give them a helping hand to be able to do more.

Mr. Speaker, the Democratic Labour Party has within the last few months been talking about missing homes and I think this ties in with the National Assistance Board because, when the concept was developed in the early 1980s after a Barbados Labour Party Administration, we also had very poor people, and we still do have thousands of destitute people among us, who cannot help themselves, whether it be to build a house or to repair the house in which they live.

Sir, I saw one in the newspapers because, for the way that the Democratic Labour Party was behaving, Mr. Speaker, you would have felt that all old houses would have been demolished and new houses built up. Sir, when the Rural Development Commission does not put any money in the project for house repairs, then you cannot get houses. Sir, when the Urban Development Commission cannot build four houses in a whole year, then the needs of those people are still there and, Sir, they are getting worse.

Mr. Speaker, it rained all last year and all kinds of things happened. What about those people in houses, who were getting wet? Therefore, those National Assistance

Board's houses were built by the Government then in 1980 or 1981 to put a shelter over the heads of those very destitute persons.

Mr. Speaker, they were not getting any National Insurance benefits, they were not getting any gratuities. Some did not have any security of tenure and, therefore, they did not get a lump sum of anything to help themselves. Sir, those houses, over the years, Mr. Speaker, served as an excellent purpose for holding families together. Sir, that is what we want. We want families living in communities, working with one another and passing on the various morals and good ethics we know that helped build families and societies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a result of some of the seniors passing on, because they did not have children, those houses became abandoned and those Governments, not only a Barbados Labour Party Government, because there was a Government of the Democratic Labour Party in 1986 to 1994, that did not continue a maintenance programme to make sure that those houses were handed over to other families that were in need. Sir, some of those houses just went out the system.

Mr. Speaker, there were other houses, where families remained in them and because there was no proper inventory being done, the families extended the houses but, Sir, there was nothing wrong with that.

10.30 a.m.

If a grandmother and a grandfather lived there with a daughter and two children and the grandparents died, why should the two children and their children be turned away. Those houses, over time, because of poor maintenance programmes, went into disrepair. Similarly, those that remained empty were heavily vandalised.

I believe it is time that the Government speaks to the issue of the houses they say are missing, because many of them are the National Assistance Board houses that are still there. Mr. Speaker, there is one in Arthur Seat, Jackson, which for the last 10 years I have been asking about. Nobody occupies the house. Letters have been sent. There was no response, because there was no proper inventory of where these houses were located. Sir, I know that inventories were prepared for 2003 and 2004, and the names of the individuals who were living in them at that time had been established.

Sir, a house built in 1980, this is now 2009 without any maintenance, tells me how these houses could be in existence. Therefore, I believe that Government has a responsibility of making sure that the National Assistance Board houses still in existence be properly refurbished, if

not through the Ministry of Housing, through the Rural Development Commission.

Mr. Speaker, in the parish where I live, there is a District Hospital. The Honourable Member for St. Philip West will tell you of its importance, because he has been working in gerontology and had been employed by the Geriatric Hospital for many years and, of course, would have attended patients at that level.

The Honourable Member can tell you of the dynamism that flows from the League of Friends through our District Hospitals. It is critical that the District Hospitals have Leagues of Friends associated with them, because we need persons in communities living around the District Hospitals who can contribute a tithe of their time.

Asides.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: I know that St. Philip has and St. Thomas has too, but I am grandstanding about St. Thomas. I cannot speak about St. Philip. St. Philip has three people to speak on its behalf.

Sir, the concept is for those persons living in the villages surrounding the District Hospitals to go in and tithe time, to tithe their resources, to minister, to plan activities for the District Hospitals so that persons living there are not shut away with the feeling that they are second-class citizens. It is very important.

Sir, I will support any effort, because I chaired that League of Friends for more than 12 years, to make sure that plans and programmes were put in place. I must tell you that the District Hospital has turned out, over the last four years, about six centenarians, so it speaks to the quality of care that is offered in the District Hospitals in Barbados, the Gordon Cummins District Hospital.

Asides.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: Sir, when I say “turn out”, the Minister of Education wants me to know of his ability to speak the English Language. Therefore, let me say it another way. They were able to live in the District Hospital, some for 15, 20 and 25 years, and to celebrate their 100th birthday in the Gordon Cummins District Hospital.

Sir, the service is important. I want to highly commend the Garrison Secondary School, because the Honourable Member spoke about connections, the generational links. That is what it really is. In 2002-2004, the Garrison Secondary School, with the wisdom of the Guidance Counsellor and members of staff, developed a relationship between the District Hospital and the school,

taking over the students to work with the senior citizens to ensure that the generational links are there.

Sir, as you are aware, there are very young people who shove them aside and tell them that they are “dotish” and they have had their time already. Sir, they even tell me so now and I am not that old. I believe that when you go into your community, young people would tell you that you are not young, either, and you are not saying a “pang”, because they believe that we are now going over the hills.

Sir, I believe this concept should be replicated across the length and breadth of Barbados, so we can develop young people who have an appreciation and a measure of respect for senior citizens, and to be able to work with them in an engaging way by reading with them. The Brownies, Scouts and other service clubs do it and I believe this is what would help us to encourage happy relationships in Barbados.

Sir, the Honourable Minister for Social Care spoke highly about the staff at the National Assistance Board. I support him as well in his call for proper training, because it is a fact that some of the members of staff, only a small percentage, may have negative attitudes. It is like any other profession. A small percentage may have gone in with negative attitudes which places the National Assistance Board’s name to come into disrepute.

Sir, if there were only four incidents over the last 25 years, that four, for me, would resonate with Barbadians. Somehow, it is in our culture, our psyche, that we harp on the negative first and forget the 1 000 things, or the 99.9 per cent good that has happened.

I support the Honourable Member’s call for the proper recruitment of staff to employ persons with the right attitude. There are times when people are desperate and in need of a job, we show compassion because we understand their personal challenges and offer assistance, but if they are not cut out to the job of responding to old people, listening to them, and at times smelling the urine and so on when they arrive at the door, they cannot cope in that kind of environment.

Sir, it is the same thing if you are a police officer. You go in knowing that it calls for long hours of standing and by the time they complete a year’s service, they realise the job is not for them. Well, come out. Do not stay in it because you cannot be effective.

Sir, if it is a teacher who says that the children are talking all the time and I am getting tired of them, get out of the job. You are not cut out for teaching, or you are not cut out for the Home Help Service if you cannot tolerate old people and empathize with them.

Sir, I support the Honourable Member in his call because it was the vision of the Barbados Labour Party to speak to the Principal and staff of the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, to indicate that we need properly trained people if they are going to work with our seniors, because old people are not accustomed to strangers. It takes a long time to break down that barrier. If it is not your child or neighbour, you do not want to speak with them because you always feel intimidated by their presence, they might steal the money in the pot under the bed, or take away the groceries in the cupboard and so on.

Sir, it is a measure of confidentiality, respect and compassion that come into play, and I support the call for further training for the staff at the National Assistance Board, but more particularly, for persons now entering with the training first as members of staff.

Sir, I want to say categorically that it is not always people with certificates who can do a job well, a practice we have to watch in Barbados.

The Honourable Member spoke about the NISE programme. We have persons with doctorates and all kinds of high-level certificates who are perfect snobs. We have some persons working in the social agencies to the Welfare Department, who speak to you in a manner which makes you feel like a little girl or little boy in the yard. Therefore, I am not saying that all of them are like that, would really be unfaithful and untrue.

Sir, when you go to the social services, the treatment you receive up-front brings out some negatives. Sometimes you feel less than a human, and never look forward to returning. You would prefer to suck salt to raise your children, to get the problem resolved, or whatever, rather than returning.

Sir, I am saying that if you are talking home help, we may not want to stick rigidly, even though I understand the circumstances with employment in the country, to four CXC's. You want persons who have a measure of compassion, care and concern who can do an exceptionally good job, who have no certificates, but holds the certificate called the "Training and Care of the Elderly".

10.40 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, everybody knows my take on the well-dressed part. I believe that people should be dressed, modestly and that the standard must be set. How can we be calling for children in school to be properly dressed, which is something that I strongly support, because it has always been the case, but when it comes to employees, those employees are going in scantily-dressed, and then old people cannot deal with this.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot deal with the outfits now where some young women and older ones too, have all of their bosoms exposed. It is not a part of the culture that I know. I remember my mother always used to say that even though you are poor, do not look poor. Your Sunday School dress must not go into town shopping. Your Church dress must not go into the yard to cut the canes or do whatever. Therefore, we need to work with our young people.

Some of them do not know any better, but I believe that persons who are working with anybody at all of the humankind, whether they are children, adults or senior citizens, modesty in the way they dress is extremely important, and the professional way in which they deliver themselves that, for me, is the best thing in the whole wide world.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say that there is a group of persons in this country who, for many generations have been toiling in the communities where they live. There are some communities that will never get the home help because when the visits are made for the assessments, sometimes the conditions in the home do not appear as though they would merit a home helper.

I know that Government cannot provide all. I would be silly, Sir, to think that Government can provide home helpers for everybody who makes request, but we have a category of women in Barbados, Mr. Speaker, who know the seniors, so the seniors would open up to them and allow them into their houses to offer services and, Sir, they do it for free.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have reached the stage in Barbados when we must make a strong argument and put forward proper proposals for persons in un-waged labour. They get nothing and they do not want anything for the service that they are offering to the seniors but they are women who are unemployed. Therefore, I can talk about Hilda, and I will not call the rest of her name, who would have worked for about four old people in the Vault Road alone, making sure that they get their breakfast in the morning; ensuring that in the afternoon, they get their dinner and would minister to them and really make them feel comfortable. They would also check with them periodically to make sure that they were safe. They wash their clothes, hang them out to dry, do everything.

Mr. Speaker, in every community or village, you can find women who still do that, because they have that caring element that they have nurtured over the years, where they want to give back to their society. This is something that I would support, un-waged labour for persons in communities, who work with senior citizens. I believe it is about time, Sir, that we make an effort.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes I smile, and this is not a negative criticism of the Honourable Members on the Other Side, but I know for a fact that half of them have never done any community work yet. They may have attended a community group meeting in the villages or communities where they live.

Sir, I put forward a proposal since 2002, associated with this same kind of work and I will speak to it in the few moments I have left. I believe that every effort that is put in place in Barbados to develop human beings to ensure that they ensure quality care, should be examined so critically and put in place, because it complements what the Government is doing and what some other community clubs are doing.

Mr. Speaker, this project was to do with some communities in the parish where I live, because you would appreciate that because of demographic shifts now, St. Thomas has hundreds of houses where middle class people live. Sir, middle-class people were at one point in time working-class people too, and because of the opportunity for employment, good education and proper health care, Sir, they have reached the stage now where they are in a middle-class category. Sir, why must they be left out?

Mr. Speaker, you know, as well as I do, that there are some senior citizens in the homes, where some of their children or some persons offer them a meal. Mr. Speaker, do you know where the meal is? In a flask that is so tightly shut down that when they are ready to eat, their hands are so feeble, they cannot get that flask unscrewed.

Sir, some of them have no food to eat, some of them are bed-ridden and there is nobody to call. Sometimes, they cannot even reach the phone, because they are now becoming senile, dementia or even Alzheimers, and there is nobody to stay at home with them. Therefore, the doors have to be locked with the senior citizens on the inside.

The project that was proposed, Sir, visits were met, almost everything was put in place to have that project established in the parish of St. Thomas. Do you know what it said? Mr. Speaker, it said that having identified the location that is a Government property, it only wanted vesting that the senior citizens in the communities would be coming in on a day care basis. Therefore, they would come in on mornings for 7:00 o'clock, and on evenings at 7 o'clock the families could pick them up.

Sir, if there was somewhere that the families who work with them all the time wanted to go on a cruise for four days, the senior citizens could stay at the institution and give that family a chance, because it is no easy task, Mr. Speaker, working with persons who are aged.

Sir, that was not all. Approaches were made to some of the training agencies, the SJPP, TVET Council, because there are women in St. Thomas that are unemployed, who possess the skills as I spoke of just now of Hilda, and if they could get the training to happen at the Lester Vaughan School for 15 to 20 women on an annual basis, they would be the ones working at the institution.

Those middle-class persons, who have families that have nowhere to take them, because of limited places in this country, would have been able to bring their families for a fee. The concept also included a few of the persons from the villages surrounding that location, who would have had no money at all, that they too, would have gotten the daycare, and they would have done the occupational therapy, they would have gone on trips and so on.

Mr. Speaker, that project is still hanging.

Mr. Speaker, what I will do is to submit it to the Honourable Minister, because it is not a project now about me, a resident, or the Member of Parliament, but it is a project about the people of the parish who deserve to get quality care from the health agencies and other agencies that the Honourable Member spoke about.

Mr. Speaker, we support the Bill for the Amendment and we look forward to the Government expanding the project, facilitating the training for the persons who would be coming in, ensuring that there are best practices, because it is very disconcerting when persons are accused of stealing money and carrying away furniture, and taking away properties from senior citizens. It is not always true, but to make sure that those persons are above board, I believe that element of training, professionalism and record-keeping should be in place to safeguard those individuals who are the home help workers from the problems.

I believe that the Board has its work cut out for it in these times when people are growing older. The Organisation for The Aged has been in existence. I believe that some of those persons on the same committee would be able to make recommendations to other institutions, the Bar-Brits and other organisations to come on board and visit the institutions. Sir, some of them could, at least, tithe one hour per week to those persons in the various institutions, so that it can give them a measure of hope and comfort in their twilight years.

10.50 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the privilege. I wish that Government would continue to carry on the programmes that they found in place in relation to this particular aspect of the National Assistance Board, and the other agencies that must come into play to ensure that

quality service is delivered to all Barbadians, especially those who are in need and cannot help themselves.

With those comments, Sir, I thank you sincerely.

Mr. SPEAKER: I am obliged. The Honourable Member for St. Michael South East.

Mr. H. F. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly be supporting this Amendment before this Honourable Chamber. It could not have come at a better time in our social development process. I am saying that against a background that there is a serious changing demographic profile as it relates to the elderly in Barbados, that we are going to have to pay special attention to.

There is a projection that by the year 2025, more than half of our population will be over the age of 50, which means that we are going to have to plan for this sudden paradigm shift as it relates to population ageing, hence the principle of active ageing must be pursued. Sir, if we do not pursue a policy of active ageing for our seniors, most of them might live a life of pure hibernation.

Mr. Speaker, I have been employed at the National Assistance Board for 14 years of my life and I would have had the experiences of working with most of the seniors across the length and breadth of Barbados.

Sir, most of the staff of the National Assistance Board must be complimented for the wonderful work they have been doing towards our seniors, when we look at the fact that they have developed across Barbados 11 activity centres, therefore, they have embodied the whole element and principle of active ageing.

Sir, out of all the activity centres across Barbados, the two most active ones, when I was there, was Gall Hill, in St. John and St. Christopher in Christ Church. At this point in time in Barbados, senior citizens from all across the villages are going to these activity centres. Many skills are taught and many experiences are shared at these activity centres.

Sir, at some point in time, we are going to have to devise a programme, in collaboration with the University of the West Indies, to develop a proposed memory bank to store the memories and the experiences of our seniors. Our seniors are the repositories of the oral tradition for things like Hurricane Janet and the Riots. We have elderly persons who could relate the events that happened in those periods of time.

Mr. Speaker, I could see a project developing between the University of the West Indies and the National Assistance Board on this memory bank programme, bearing in mind that it is not a new thing to the Caribbean.

The memory bank programme is one that has been fully developed in Jamaica at the University of the West Indies, Mona. They have really mastered this whole programme of a memory bank.

Sir, I really believe that we have to pay serious attention to our elderly men. Unlike our women who are mostly involved in serious activities across Barbados. Our elderly men are not getting involved in anything. We had a difficulty of getting men involved with the senior citizens' drama group. Out of the approximately 25 members, only one is a male.

Sir, we have to pay special attention to getting our elderly men involved in serious programmes, because when you go around the country like now, you could find a lot of them, may be under a tree playing dominoes or cards or by a rum shop.

Mr. Speaker, we must nationalise the senior citizens' drama group to get those seniors 85 and 86 years old and those in the 70s to do two-hour productions. I feel that a national drama programme for seniors must be encouraged. It is done across the Caribbean in Trinidad and Tobago, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Jamaica.

I also want to congratulate the National Assistance Board on its wonderful Bereavement Programme. If you lost a loved one, they provide you with the necessary counselling. Sir, I believe that at some point in time, we would have to hold a regional conference on Bereavement, because it is one of the fastest growing institutions where people come together and discuss, work out and share their own experiences.

Mr. Speaker, another programme they have in place is that of travelling. Our seniors are travelling on the cruise ships. I really want to compliment Ms. Hunte and the others at the National Assistance Board who are doing a wonderful job in terms of programming for the seniors.

The seniors in that programme depart the Bridgetown Port twice a year, go across the Caribbean, do their own little shopping and their own little exchanges. It is a happy programme. Sir, I believe that we could expand this programme to get more elderly persons across Barbados travelling and cruising the high seas and really enjoying themselves. This is a wonderful programme that is at the National Assistance Board.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister spoke to the importance of the treatment and the care of our elderly, which is sometimes a hurting situation and sometimes very annoying. Too many of our senior citizens - the Minister of Health spoke to it and I remember reading it in the newspapers - are being abandoned at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, families across Barbados have to be far more responsible. We cannot leave everything to Government. Government cannot take on the whole burden of the entire island, therefore, not only the families, but the entire communities must also act as a kind of extended family towards our senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, the home helpers in Barbados are doing a good job. In some cases, a lot is left to be desired also. There are some who are on five days a week and some who are on three days a week. The Minister has said that he would like to see the system regularise so that all the workers could be placed on a five-day a week programme. The Honourable Member for St. Thomas also spoke of the importance of the human factor in dealing with our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like to propose this morning in this Honourable Chamber is that we take the washing and the cooking out of the home care programme and establish a national meals-on-wheel service for our seniors. We could establish a laundry and have those workers who are currently on a three-day week, wash the senior citizens clothes in one place. These are areas that we could explore and introduce.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am thinking that we need a more hands-on service to the elderly. We need more reading or more counselling. Sir, I would want to say that nothing pleases a senior citizen more than when you can talk to them, when you can share experiences with them, when you can be reading the Bible to them, and just leave the general cleaning of the senior citizens' homes to the home helpers. Mr. Speaker, I am saying that once we approach it at a national level, then we are going to provide a far more effective service.

We should also look at re-introducing the Smart-Clean Programme, where we get persons from within the same communities to clean the inside and outside of these senior citizens' homes, where we spruce up and paint them. That programme is one that will see the respective community looking after the homes of these senior citizens, doing cleaning, debushing, cleaning their yards, scrubbing their homes.

I also believe there are a number of senior citizens in the communities who have worked over the years and have helped the communities and this nation. Sir, I am proposing that at these Resource Centres we could establish either a Hall of Fame or a Wall of Fame to immortalise the deeds our senior citizens have done for

their communities and for this island. Mr. Speaker, this aspect of a community Hall of Fame or Wall of Fame

will certainly immortalise the memory, the work and worth of these senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, we must create the necessary inter-generational linkages that are critical at this time. There is a programme sociologists across Barbados talk about a lot, but when you really examine it, one would see that very little has been done.

Sir, it is against this background that I would want to congratulate the Honourable Member for St. George South, the Honourable Minister of Family, Youth Affairs, Sports and the Environment, for introducing at Christmas time a programme called: "Operation Give Back", which basically puts into perspective the whole talk of creating inter-generational linkages. The Honourable Member took it from talk and put it into reality.

Sir, senior citizens across Barbados have benefitted because the Barbados Youth Development Council, the Girls' Guides, the Barbados Youth Service, among others, have all joined in this national project, at very short notice, and have seized on the idea and provided this kind of service for the seniors across Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, with this programme, which I must also say I am part of, you should see the joy and happiness on the faces of the seniors when you start to work on their houses. Sir, not only that, this group of young people, along with Youth Commissioners at the National Assistance Board and other interest groups across Barbados, have joined together to put on a wonderful concert at the Gymnasium, where it was attended by a number of senior citizens.

Sir, you should have seen the happiness and glow of young people serving the seniors, mixing and sharing experiences, dancing, etcetera. Sir, it was a happy experience that no money in the world could pay for.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes I always keep saying that the development of this country cannot and should not be always measured in dollars and cents.

Mr. Speaker, the private sector also came on board. They came on board in such a way that was unbelievable. Private sectors such as Harris Paints, Berger Paints, and a number of individuals came and gave of their labour. Up to now the programme is still running on Saturdays, because it is an ongoing programme and you would find that people want to volunteer. In fact, my recent information is that there is a football organisation in Barbados that wants to join the programme beginning next Saturday. This football organisation wants to paint. Sir, all this fosters the spirit of volunteerism.

Sir, nowadays when you talk about the spirit of volunteerism, everybody asks for money and so volunteerism is virtually out through the door, it is now becoming a paying exercise. Sir, those young people who are involved in this programme must be complimented for working without being paid. The idea of creating inter-generational linkages between our young people and the elderly, will transcend itself into future camps, because we must be able to bridge what we call that division in Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the Minister, because despite all the talk we hear, she, along with the Minister sitting next to her, are the only two Ministers who I have seen putting on their home clothes, getting a brush and nasying themselves while painting the homes of those senior citizens.

Sir, what I want to encourage is that Parliamentarians would join in national efforts such as this. Sir, on issues like these there can be no divide, because the Honourable Member for St. Thomas supported the concept and precept.

Asides.

Mr. H. F. LASHLEY: Sir, the fact that no work has been done there as yet, does not mean that none would be done. Sir, the fact of the matter is that the real beneficiaries of the project were the senior citizens of Barbados, and that the young people enjoyed working with them. Sir, whether or not some could have painted, the idea of giving and sharing was well received in Barbados.

Asides.

Mr. H. F. LASHLEY: Sir, I keep saying the programme is ongoing. It is not finished and by the time it is finished, everybody will get their full share. Mr. Speaker, I would want to say it is a very good programme and I do not want the Minister to be deterred. I want the Minister to forge ahead in doing what she is doing, because it is being done for the good of the senior citizens of this country.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas has begun to address an issue which we have to take seriously. I am not advocating when people provide services in this sense that they should not be paid. I am saying there is a market outside of the Home Help Programme for a special service, where persons who have been trained and have a certificate in the Care of the Elderly, where persons cannot get into Government institutions, could be encouraged to establish their own businesses and to provide that service, particularly for the middle income persons who live in the "Heights" and "Terraces", who might want to travel and cannot find anyone or anywhere to keep their parents or grandparents.

Mr. Speaker, people call the National Assistance Board to ask for this service. Therefore, this is an area where we could encourage people to start establishing their own businesses in the care of the elderly. This would also assist the National Assistance Board with its programme, once these persons have been censored and given the green light by the National Assistance Board. It is a business out there waiting to happen.

I recall the experience on CBS television, where a lady in the United States of America, who was living in a small town, had put a simple advertisement on television applying for Home Help Service. That lady got so many calls that she has now become a millionaire. She cannot service the amount of requests she gets.

When we talk about home care, we must also congratulate Don Blackman, because he was a pioneer in this area. It was he who started the Welfare Programme and also contributed massively to the Home Help Programme.

11.10 a.m.

Sir, I do not want to forget him.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Minister would have met this situation because we see it at the Urban Development Commission when we are meeting people. I think the Minister was conservative when he said 60 people, because sometimes there are as many as 75 people. Sir, sometimes we want to finish at 1:00 o'clock, but last Wednesday, the Minister did not leave until 4.30 p.m., because people kept coming all the time.

The fact is, Sir, at the National Assistance Board there are home helpers too, who need home help. Sir, they can hardly walk and it is a situation that needs to be seriously looked at. I am sure that the Minister is coming across that situation.

Mr. Speaker, another point that was raised in here that is very serious Sir, we forget sometimes that we are human beings and we behave as if we come off the planet Mars. Sir, scientists are now saying that there is some kind of life on Mars. I do not know in what form, but the whole idea of these persons who are suffering, who are non-contributing pensioners, who cannot get a pension has to be addressed.

Sir, I agree with the Minister, because when you interview some of them, some of them did not know that they had to contribute to the programme. Some of them were virtually ignorant and we cannot penalise them in their old age for not knowing. The fact is, they would have contributed in one way or the other.

Sir, there are not thousands of them. There are just a few hundreds and the only money they get is \$33 from the Welfare Department and, Sir, I will tell you, that is also discretionary, based upon the officer that they meet at the Welfare Department. Sir, some officers believe that they have a right to take off and put on whom they please.

Mr. Speaker, it is a serious thing. When you examine the fact that they are seniors, not many of them, that we as a society could forgive, because Jesus said on the Cross "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," and we could also forgive them because, in most cases, they did not know and they were not trying to cheat the system.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be far more humane in cases like these and we have to take on that responsibility. Sir, I agree with the Minister and when he brings the legislation back here to address these matters, he is sure from the outset that he has the support of the "Rastaman".

Mr. Speaker, some things develop in my life and, Sir, I laugh at them. Sir, all the social policies that have come before this Honourable Chamber so far, are what I have been announcing. Sir, now that they have been put in practice and brought into reality, there is a problem because I am supporting them. Sir, I do not understand because the Honourable Member for St. John, the Honourable Prime Minister could vouch on that. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy and the Honourable Member for St. Thomas could also vouch on that.

Asides.

Mr. H. F. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, nobody goes out there and deliberately not help people, and we always try to help. Sir, we are moving it from seven people to nine people on the Board.

Sir, I was a Minister of the National Assistance Board and certainly moving it to nine is very commendable because the role of the National Assistance Board is changing every day and the demographic profile speaks to that.

I attended a conference in Madrid, Spain, called "Creating Societies for All", and the whole methodology of principle was built on active aging. Sir, rightfully, we now have to go back to the drawing board and look at a programme at how we are going to deal with our senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, elder abuse. When I go to senior citizens' homes across Barbados, particularly the men, there are some older men in their 70s, who enjoy the company of young females. There was a case - I believe the Minister should have come across it on his desk by now - where this older man had about \$65 000 on the bank. He

and a nice attractive young woman seems to be enjoying each other's company and eventually the \$65 000 evaporated. Sir, after the water evaporation, rain fell on the relationship and he complained to the Press. Sir, this is something that happens every day.

Mr. Speaker, we have to start an educational programme particularly with the seniors, teaching them about dementia and Alzheimers, because many problems that elderly people experience in Barbados, sometimes are due to a lack of ignorance by their families. I believe we educate them because once you get dementia, you keep forgetting and with Alzheimers, it is worse. When old people get miserable, there is a medical terminology, but the Honourable Member for St. Philip West could more describe the medical complications better than I would, but, Sir, I have witnessed them.

Mr. Speaker, senior citizens across Barbados is a group and that the society is measured by how we protect the two most vulnerable sectors, our children and our elderly.

Mr. Speaker, finally, it would be remiss of me, if I did not use this occasion to congratulate the work that Mr. Ralph Walker did, who was the Chairman at the time I was there, who was very creative in his work. I will have a discussion with the Minister of Tourism because, in Barbados, our senior citizens have preserved our culture in a way that is remarkable.

Sir, the "comforts", the "rolly-pollies" and the craft that they make at home could easily be packaged and sold to our visitors. Sir, that is a market waiting to be explored, so that we could bring our seniors into the whole marketing area of tourism in Barbados. Mr. Speaker, when the whole concept of community tourism is fully developed, our seniors are going to play an intricate part in this whole exercise.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, again I just want to say that I support the Amendment. It is timely at the moment. It is much needed, so that we could get on to do an expanded service for our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

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

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I join this debate, firstly to congratulate the Minister for the foresight in his delivery in terms of the approach to be taken by this Government, in relation to the care of the elderly, and the need to reform the National Assistance Board. I want, Mr. Speaker, to put this debate in its rightful context.

Sir, certainly, after hearing the Honourable Member for St. Thomas address this Chamber in such detail, in relation to all the proposals and ideas that she apparently now has and in relation to the National Assistance Board and all the things she believes, ought to be done now by this Government.

11.20 a.m.

I certainly believe that we have an obligation on This Side to put the debate in its true perspective. I believe that having listed in excess of 10 or 11 recommendations about what should happen in the National Assistance Board, that by itself shows the failure, not only of the Honourable Member, but the failure of the Barbados Labour Party in its entire approach and policy in relation to the National Assistance Board and the care of the elderly.

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

Miss C. Y. FORDE: On a point of order. Sir, I have not made recommendations. I supported the comments that were made by the Honourable Minister, in his presentation about the training of workers, and I spoke to a project that was already identified in 2002. I said that I will write officially to the Government about the project. I have not made any recommendations and therefore I do not want the Honourable Member to mislead this Honourable Chamber on this issue.

Mr. SPEAKER: Very well.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, I continue because I heard the Honourable Member making recommendations and suggestions, in relation to the National Assistance Board. It is my submission that those submissions and recommendations made by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas disclosed a general failure of the Barbados Labour Party in relation to how it dealt with the National Assistance Board.

I believe that a lot of the work that befalls to be done by this Government, in relation to the restructuring of the National Assistance Board, is as a direct result of the kind of polarisation that has occurred at the National Assistance Board, under the Barbados Labour Party Government. It is very clear.

Sir, if you examine our Manifesto, we were very clear in relation to what was wrong with the delivery of services to the elderly and why is it that in 2009, we have found ourselves with senior citizens in our communities. I know that in Christ Church West Central there are seniors, who basically have been generally neglected in their homes, and the Home Help Programme has not gone to the

extent where they could get the kind of assistance that they could have.

Sir, we have had examples brought to us where persons have been hand-picked for assistance, based on their membership and subscription in the Barbados Labour Party. That is why I support the Honourable Minister, in relation to his observation, that we need nothing less than a total complete remake of how we deliver services to the elderly, and that the National Assistance Board must be restructured.

I heard the Honourable Member speak on this on-wage labour, in relation to persons who we know in our communities, who provide services to the elderly without seeking reward. I believe that our focus in relation to the restructuring of the National Assistance Board and our focus in relation to the delivery of services to our elderly, we must not get caught up by what I call 'cheap talk'.

I heard in this Chamber quite a lot of suggestions, but I believe we have no choice, but to see the delivery of services to the elderly and the restructuring of the National Assistance Board. It must have a broad-based approach and it must be based on soliciting the assistance and help of existing agencies in our community, in relation to how we go forward, in relation to the restructuring of the National Assistance Board and the delivery of services to the elderly.

Sir, I can point to one example, which is very close to my Constituency, that is the Vauxhall Senior Citizens Home, which I believe the last Administration spent an inordinate length of time floundering in bringing that facility anywhere near to an opening.

I want to call on the Honourable Minister to have a very close look at the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Home because, although they spent so much time - wasted time - in relation to bringing that facility to an opening stage, I daresay that the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Home is still in need of resources and requires attention, the kind of attention it did not get under the Barbados Labour Party Government.

I want to appeal to the Minister to have a close look at the Vauxhall Senior Citizens Home because my information is, "all is not too well there."

Sir, I want to make it abundantly clear because in this debate, I believe we have for the record, to register our admiration for the kind of dedication shown by the staff of the National Assistance Board. I certainly do not blame them for the lack of effective and efficient structures.

I believe they have had to work and labour under very trying circumstances, and in circumstances where all

over the world the approach to how we care for our elderly has been modernised by efficient systems. We have had no such approach over the past 14 years in Barbados.

Our home help workers, who work on the National Assistance Board, have to work under very trying circumstances. That is why it has now fallen to us to adopt a modernised approach to how we fashion the delivery of services from these institutions. Sir, I want to say that for the record.

I also want to say that the quality of service delivered by the National Assistance Board is only a fraction of the level of training which has been provided to those workers over the years. Again, for the record of this Parliament, the fact that the kind of training has not been delivered to the workers of the National Assistance Board, is no fault of theirs. When I go back over the various Manifestoes of the Barbados Labour Party, that is why I am saying we have to be careful when they stand up in Parliament and make a whole set of pretty language. They now have all the sophisticated recommendations and ideas for how the National Assistance Board should be delivered, but when you examine their record, it is really almost an insult to the intelligence of Barbadians, in relation to what has happened in the past under their stewardship and what they are saying now.

Sir, if you look at their Manifestoes, the 1994 Manifesto contains a number of recommendations for the elderly. They spoke of providing a flexible domiciliary for the elderly. They would have a system of regular inspections and the monitoring of nursing homes, centres and so on. They spoke about upgrading the Home Help Service and the extension, which is important because we have addressed it in our Manifesto, of day care services for our elderly.

Sir, we have to deal with these issues now because they have not been dealt with, in spite of the promises by the Barbados Labour Party.

Asides.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: I know that we have only expanded the Board, but it is important because of the issues that have been raised on the Other Side. I believe the time will come when we will have a full debate on the whole question of the care of the elderly, the aging and how we should approach it in Barbados. It is important for the record to say these things.

Sir, I support the Bill which is before us to expand the membership of the National Assistance Board. I believe what you would see going forward from this Government is a more enlightened approach to how the National Assistance Board should function. I would wish that the

Honourable Minister, and indeed, the relevant authorities would have a look at the systems being adopted in other countries, particularly that of the United Kingdom, where the whole look and feel of institutions that provide services to the elderly have been reformed.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I went to one such facility in London a few years ago and I could not believe it, but there was nothing that could suggest that this institution was delivering services to the elderly. It was very well outfitted. It looked like any regular private sector agency, which recognised that as you walk through the door, there must be a level of efficiency, the database collection, the use of modern technology to ensure that the elderly who seek services could access those services in an environment conducive to the kind of contributions they have made to their society.

Sir, I want to encourage the National Assistance Board now that it is being expanded. I want to certainly encourage the Ministry to look at those systems that exist in other countries. They have been modernised and, I believe, we have to modernise our systems as well. At the end of the day, whether it is the Welfare Department, the delivery of services in the community, or the delivery of services to the elderly, I believe the most important facet of that is how we deliver those services at the community level.

There is still a need, Mr. Speaker, to further decentralise the services of the National Assistance Board and the Welfare Department. It is interesting that we are debating this Amendment at the same time we are debating the Constituency Council Bill. I believe the two of these measures are so inter-related and how we move forward in relation to volunteers in particular.

I think we need to have a structured system by which we recognise those volunteers who are in our communities. I have several, Mr. Speaker, in my Constituency, who go into old people's homes on a regular basis and read to them, provide meals to them, and do other things, and although they do these things on a volunteer basis, they need assistance. They need cleaners and other things to help them. I want to urge the Minister to incorporate these volunteers into any new repackaging of the programme that we will be putting to Barbadians, in relation to the National Assistance Board.

Mr. Speaker, there are churches in Barbados engaged in providing meals to senior citizens. There are churches involved in providing bereavement services and I believe that we would be missing the boat if we seek to re-invent the wheel and we have to so structure our programme, that we re-ignite and re-connect with these

organisations or agencies that are already out here providing the services.

There is no need, Mr. Speaker, for a lot of what I call, “hairy-fairy” recommendations, which I hear coming from the Honourable Member for St. Thomas. What we need are practical solutions in relation to how we go forward and if we actually re-ignite that community awareness, which I know will come in relation to the Constituency Councils, which they are not supporting.

Mr. Speaker, we will go a long way towards assisting agencies like the National Assistance Board and other agencies in the provision of services, particularly to the elderly and those who most need those services.

Asides.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, in closing, I wish again to underscore my support. I think with the right kind of support by this Administration to the National Assistance Board, with the right training which they have been deprived of for so many years, and for the removal of the puttersation - As a matter of fact, that came to an end on January 15.

Mr. Speaker, it is because of that handpicking and puttersation of the National Assistance Board by the Barbados Labour Party, that we have the kind of neglect that we are now required to fix, and it has to be said for the record. Therefore, it is not enough to come in here and feel reborn, in relation to what is necessary for the National Assistance Board.

Mr. Speaker, I feel the Barbados Labour Party should spend some time in this Chamber listening a bit more.

Asides.

Mr. S. LASHLEY: And learning a bit more, because having made so much blunders over the past 14½ years, I wonder if they are really in their true minds, when they stand up with all these exclamations of wonder and glory and what we should do, which they really never did. This is why I keep the records.

Mr. Speaker, their 1994 Manifesto was so elaborate in the kind of proposals for the elderly in Barbados. Indeed, I have come to the conclusion that the Barbados Labour Party has carefully concocted an approach in Barbados by which, somehow, it knows what people want and it usually etched it is black and white in their Manifestoes, but with no intention to put them into place.

Asides.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Sir, none whatsoever. Sir, there are about 15 paragraphs. I mentioned some before and I do not want to go back through them. They said, in 1994, that the elderly have had no relief for many years, and the need for increased pensions is great. I do not know why in the last Budget the Honourable Member for St. John had to increase pensions. This is 1994 and then they came in their agenda, “Every Bajan a Winner” in 2003-2008. Sir, they spent only one and one-half paragraphs on the elderly.

Sir, in 2003, they said that they will undertake a phased refurbishment of the Geriatric Hospital and construct a modern rehabilitation unit, day care centre, Administration block and food service area. I do not know if the Honourable Member for St. James South is aware that this is the new shape of the Geriatric Hospital, or whether the former Minister of Health could tell us if this has occurred.

Sir, they went further to say that they will complete the refurbishment of District Hospitals in Barbados. Sir, the reason we now have to come up with a programme to refurbish and restructure Geriatric Hospitals is because it has not occurred.

Mr. Speaker, I think that rather than standing up and trying to tell Barbadians how informed they are now, the first thing for every Honourable Member of the Barbados Labour Party when they pronounce in here, should be a humble apology to the people of Barbados for their lack of stewardship.

Asides.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: They should apologise, Sir. As a matter of fact, they should follow the lead of the absentee Member for St. Peter, who really is never in his Chair, somehow. As a new Member, Sir, I would have felt and would have wanted to hear from him on major matters, but to no avail.

Sir, in this very lavished document called: A Green Paper, and I want to underscore it, A Green Paper Towards a Society for All Ages, very nice language, A National Policy on Ageing. Sir, they said they would set up a Department of Elderly Affairs, supported by an Advisory Commission and that this would be given the highest priority. Sir, it has not occurred to date.

Sir, they said they would set up institutional arrangements for the elderly. I am not aware if the Honourable Member for St. Thomas read these documents. May be she has or she has not, but really and truly, Sir, as one of the newest Members of Parliament, one of the commitments I made to my constituents is that I will be true and faithful in relation to my stewardship.

Asides.

11.40 a.m.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: I had a very interesting town hall meeting in Silver Hill, the kind of outreach in relation to constituents which I would really suggest that the Honourable Member for St. Thomas should follow.

Sir, our approach is completely different. The reason I have spent so much time on this is because I sat very quietly, and if I was not informed, I would really believe that the Honourable Member for St. Thomas was on to something and that, in fact, she really had some very good ideas in relation to this issue before this Chamber. Sir, in this document, "A Green Paper Towards the Society for All Ages", they promised to provide two-bedroom replacement houses for older persons rather than the one-bedroom houses now being constructed. Sir, I do not know if the Minister of Housing could tell us if that has occurred. Sir, this Green Paper on Ageing does not seem to have a date. Does it have a date?

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, could you cite the document properly for the record, please?

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Yes, Sir, I am looking for it because the date seems to be hidden in the pages. Sir, it has no date.

Asides.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Sir, I am told it is dated about 2004, but the document itself...

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, if you are going to quote from it, you need to cite it with specificity so that we could find it. Tell us who is the author and so on.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Sir, it has a message from the Honourable Hamilton Lashley, the Minister of Social Transformation, so I would take it that it is a document from the Ministry of Social Transformation. I believe it is already a document of the House.

Mr. SPEAKER: If it is a document of the House, that is fine.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: They recognise it because I saw them looked at it with a certain amount of recognition. Sir, it is now left to the Honourable Minister responsible to really put a caring face in relation to how the National Assistance Board is structured. Sir, Green Paper, White Paper, whatever Paper, the former Barbados Labour Party Government has shown that they really and truly lack the

desire, the passion and the will to put in place any of these policies. That is why I want to put it in perspective.

Sir, I will not delay this Honourable Chamber any further. I would like to encourage a comprehensive approach to the care of the elderly and that the restructuring of the systems of Government are done in a way that incorporates existing institutions, both in the private sector and in the community. I believe that with a re-packaged Community Home Help Programme, we can deliver the kind of caring services that our elderly require and deserve.

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

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

Hon. Dr. E. R. BYER-SUCKOO: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this Bill by the Minister of Social Care, which speaks to a very important issue, that of the care of our elderly. Indeed, having responsibility for the Ministry of Family, we are aware that the elderly is a very important part of the family. Sir, although most of our programmes are seeking to address parents between the age of 25 and 50, we do know that we have to have a holistic approach to the family, not only in working with children, with the youth and with the middle aged, but in working with the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, we are in the process of developing inter-agency collaborations with the Ministry of Social Care, in particular the National Assistance Board, to make sure that no sector of the family is left out.

Mr. Speaker, I have a particular interest in making sure that our elderly are well looked after. I engaged in a medical practice in St. George and a majority of my patients were senior citizens. In fact, I had centenarians in my practice. Sir, having to go to their homes to do house calls, I am very aware of the conditions in which some of our elderly live.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge those persons, lest I forget later, who engaged in the provision of the care and services to our elderly. Reference was made to the Church, volunteer groups, youth groups, nurses, home helpers, the National Assistance Board and all those persons who take it upon themselves to go and look after the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, I have found that sometimes what our elderly people crave more than anything else, medical attention or having their homes clean up, is human contact. Many of our old people live alone. What is said is that many of our elderly, even if they are not residing in a home

by themselves, are still very much alone and that depression is a serious issue among our elderly people.

Sir, our old people may live in a house with other members of the family, but they do not have any meaningful interaction with them. Other members of the family come and go, by-pass them sitting there. They do not take the time to read to them, to chat with them,, to tell them about the day or to discuss what happened on the radio.

Sometimes our old people's only friend is the radio and they stay tuned to that radio all day long because that is their only point of contact with the outside world. Sir, it means so much to them to be able to have another living person just come and rest a hand on their shoulders and enquire how they are doing.

Indeed, I have an elderly patient who is 100 years old, and while I am no longer practising I still go and look for her from time to time. Sir, her family would tell you that when this lady is ill, she would call for me, and from the time she sees me, she feels better because all she needed was just to have me enquire sincerely into how she was doing. She does not receive any medication, but to have somebody there interacting with her makes her feel better.

Apart from humanitarian concerns and just looking after other people, we have to appreciate the value our elderly bring to the society. Too often, that is forgotten. Many of our young people are not aware of the value that resides within our senior citizens.

I have had the pleasure of watching some young people over the last couple of months as we started the "Project Give Back." They had the opportunity not just to paint the homes and clean the surroundings of the elderly but to interact with them, and they came away more enriched. Some of them have not had so significant an interaction with old people before and it was amazing the impression that it made on them.

Sir, these young teenagers asked me if they could do it again next week. They had signed on as a group, as a school or whatever for just one session, but they asked if they could come again next week and bring a friend, because this has turned out to be so rewarding.

The 'Project Give Back' was designed for the purpose for inter-generational linkages. Our society has not or does not provide opportunities for that kind of linkage anymore.

Sir, we were hoping to have the project finished over the Christmas season, and it did not, so we now have an opportunity to expand the programme into one that goes on

every weekend. Sir, more and more people are getting interested in the programme. If the programme had just happened over the Christmas season, it would have died right after that.

Mr. Speaker, the point was made that the Constituency Councils, also coming out of the Ministry of Social Care, recognise the value that our old people and our seniors have for society, and so we are engaging them at that level also because they have a lot of knowledge to offer. My colleagues spoke of the advice that is given. Sir, that wisdom only comes with age, and so again bringing them on to the Constituency Councils would help.

11.50 a.m.

I do not want anybody to begrudge any of the recipients in "Project Give Back", regardless of how big their houses might have looked or whatever. Those persons have served our society well. Sir, I was saddened that somebody would begrudge an elderly couple whose house is being spruced up. Sir, there was nobody else to do it for them. The gentleman who had a stroke and his wife had just had surgery. Sir, I think we owe our senior citizens at least the respect, if nothing else, to be able to assist them.

Mr. Speaker, as the Ministry, through the National Assistance Board, looks to revise its programme and policy, there are some issues I want to bring to the attention of all. Some may have been mentioned already.

Sir, one of these issues is providing the opportunity for exercise. Formal exercise like getting up on mornings and walking is not something a lot of our senior citizens do. We see more and more of them doing it, but there are a lot of our senior citizens who may have worked very hard as a part of their way of life and now, may be, because they are crippled by arthritis or whatever, may not have the opportunity to do that kind of work and so find themselves more and more being confined to a bed or chair. Sir, any programme that is re-designed now will include an opportunity for them to have some kind of exercise. Sir, this is important because as their activities decline, we know the risk of other diseases that would increase.

Mr. Speaker, it is not a natural thing for our senior citizens to think of exercise in terms of getting up and going to the gym. For them hard work was a way of life, and so to tell them now to get up and do some form of exercise would be somewhat foreign to many of them. Therefore, to be able to encourage them must be part of our programme.

Mr. Speaker, we need to address their health issues. Mention was made of the chronic non-communicable diseases with which an increasing number of our elderly people are afflicted. Alzheimer's disease was mentioned,

and based on the comments from the Honourable Member for Christ Church West Central, we wonder if, indeed, Alzheimer's disease is not setting in on That Side of the House.

Sir, we noticed that Alzheimer's disease is becoming increasingly prevalent and with that, there are serious issues that our elderly people face.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. Thomas.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: On a point of order. The Honourable Member speaks to This Side as suffering from Alzheimer's disease and I think the Honourable Member should be made to withdraw that remark.

Asides.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: No, the Honourable Member is not wondering yet, because she in for photo shoots that will destroy her. I will like the Honourable Member to withdraw those comments.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, although the Honourable Member for St. George South did say "wonder", it is the kind of uncharitable language that I would not like to see perpetuated and so I invite the Honourable Member to withdraw the remark and to move on.

Dr. the Hon. E. R. BYER-SUCKOO: Mr. Speaker, I am guided by you and so I would withdraw the comment.

Sir, my colleague had mentioned earlier that it seems as though some people have forgotten that promises were made but that those promises were never carried out, for whatever reasons. Sir, my concern is not them. My concern is the elderly people of our society and today I want to focus on the elderly for the next few minutes.

Mr. Speaker, in mentioning Alzheimer's disease, I was making the point that any programme of care for our elderly must acknowledge that Alzheimer's disease and other causes of memory loss and dementia are now featuring very frequently among the elderly population, and that carries its own challenges. Persons who have varying degrees of dementia may forget simple things like how to clean themselves. Sir, simple hygiene is something they might forget and so care-givers have to remember that.

Mr. Speaker, safety is another challenge to these persons. Sir, things like turning off the iron, turning off the

stove or locking the door have become challenges to our senior citizens. Sir, in our society that is now very important. Gone are the days when people could go to sleep and leave their doors opened. May be that is how some of them might have been socialised, but they have to remember to lock their doors. They may forget the telephone number of their next-of-kin, something they may have dialed several times a day, sometimes for years, but now because of memory loss, they have forgotten that contact person should they feel ill.

Mr. Speaker, another challenge to these persons is in the form of taking medication. Sir, we have a society that does not like to take medication. Doctors have often complained that patients have reneged on taking medication, but even with the best of commitment, when your memory is failing, you forget to take your medication, and among the elderly sometimes not taking that medication can be crucial.

I mentioned the need for the human touch. Sir, depression is very prevalent among our elderly. We see cases of the elderly who are abused and abandoned. We see them abandoned at the Accident and Emergency Department, where once they fall ill and go there, the family member might feel relieved from that burden of care and so, that family member is not too eager to go back and pick up that senior citizen. Sir, of course, that puts a drain on our resources, on our facilities and institutions.

Mr. Speaker, those are issues that need to be policed. We know that the National Assistance Board and the Ministry would have to step up on policing and regulations for provision of care for those persons. I think it is important that a database be established to identify those elderly person who are at risk. Those who, not only because of medical situations, but those who live alone, those who have health problems or those who are living in abusive homes. There needs to be some sort of registry so that special care could be given to them.

Mr. Speaker, we mentioned the workers at the National Assistance Board and how they need to be trained, or how that training needs to be expanded, but I think too that more attention has to be given to the supervision of the delivery of those services within the homes.

Mr. Speaker, we talked about social services within the community. This needs to be expanded. We talked about what Government can do, but I think in our society we need to create programmes that get people to look after their own.

Sir, the Ministry of Family, Youth Affairs, Sports and the Environment is now trying to create programmes within the society that get people to look after their own. The Ministry of Family, Youth Affairs, Sports and the

Environment, was created to help engender a society which once again looks after its own. That is why we have “Project Give Back”, so that our young people can get that chance to interact with old people.

Sir, starting with families, we want our societies to have opportunities to be able to build more cohesively once again. That has been lost. The individualism that exists in our society now has got everybody looking out for themselves and not even looking at the old lady next door, or even the old lady in the bedroom next door.

Mr. Speaker, I have seen cases, and many here may have seen some where there are elderly people who live in a home with their family, but the family members may be loathed to do anything to assist. Sir, some of the reasons I have heard for this loathing is that old person may have the house registered or is passing the house down to an older sister who lives overseas. Therefore, that relative who lives here is not bothered to take care of that elderly relative, because he or she knows that at the end of the day, when that person dies, the house or money would be passing onto another sibling.

Mr. Speaker, another issue is that of pension cheques. We have people who take pension cheques and all they are really concerned about the elderly is for their pension cheque. All they carry the old person to the doctor for is to get that certificate signed, so that they can continue to receive that old person's pension cheque. If it were not for that cheque, they would not take that old person out. Sometimes they do not even do that. When the priest comes to give communion, the priest can sign the certificate because they do not provide any effort into caring for the elderly.

Sir, we need to get that out to society. We need to raise up a generation of people who look after themselves, who look after their family members, who look after the elderly in their society.

12:00 noon.

Sir, another issue that concerns me is the quality of housing for many of our elderly people. I know that many Members of Parliament, if not all, would have visited the homes of elderly persons. May be from the outside, the home looks decent but when you go inside, there is no flooring and the person is sleeping on the floor.

Sir, many old people are living in houses that have no toilet and bath. In fact, we have an issue with old people living in homes, especially chattel homes and the toilet is outside. They often have to go down a rickety back step to get to the bathroom and this is very dangerous for elderly people.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Social Care, through the Rural Development Commission and the National Assistance Board provides service. I am really concerned about the back step to get to the toilet outside, because many a person has fallen going down that rickety back step because, often it is just a few bricks piled together in order to get to the back yard and the bathroom.

This may not exist in some parts of the urban area but I know that, certainly in the rural area, many elderly persons live in that condition. We have had cases of elderly people who have actually fallen and who have hit their heads, have broken their heads and there is bleeding of the brain because of those kinds of back steps. Sir, I encourage the Minister, as we do a survey of the quality of the homes for elderly, to take this situation into consideration. Sir, sometimes the house is decent, but the back step is of major concern.

Mr. Speaker, as far as Home Help goes, I know that it is delivered three days a week and sometimes delivered five days. Sir, my passion is to see our society start to take care of these issues. We should not have to rely on the National Assistance Board to provide care around the clock, seven days a week for our elderly. I think that we start with what Government gives, but we need to break out of the mentality to see how we could help our own.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Government cannot give everything. We are all aware of the needs, but it is not possible for Government to provide for all those needs. Sir, as a society, we need to build back that care, concern and appreciation for our elderly that show we will look after our own.

Sir, none of us know how things may be like for us, at the end of the day. I always believe that it is important that we remember that what you sow, you will reap. We need to look after our elderly people because they are very important to us.

Mr. Speaker, the concept of expanding the National Assistance Board should start with the quality before getting to the quantity of how much more staff to take on and how many more people we could provide service for.

I have had the opportunity to interact with some excellent home helpers as part of this National Assistance Board Scheme and some of them do love and care for tenderly the old people that they serve, but I have also heard some horror stories.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to have in place proper facilities and a proper programme for policing the activity of the National Assistance Board, and a programme for regulating the services and monitoring the delivery of services. Sir, as I have said, we need to establish a data

base so that we would know that we are meeting the needs of our elderly people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one more note before I close. It goes to supporting the Minister and what he is attempting to do through the National Assistance Board. I know, first-hand, that attempting to change these systems that have been in place for very long is not easy.

We all have our challenges in our respective Ministries and it is not easy to change systems that seem to have become ingrained, but to encourage him to continue to do it because, at the end of the day, it is for the elderly that he is doing this and it makes for a better society and this will redound also into our health care.

Mr. Speaker, my main interaction with our elderly was first and foremost, as a general practitioner in what now seems to be a former life. I must say that I do miss the elderly people of St. George South. I had the privilege of being the only medical practitioner operating privately in St. George South.

I have built up a good rapport with the elderly people there and I really do miss the interaction. Sir, old people are very loving, warm, generous and I do miss them very much. I have missed that level of interaction that I would have had with them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage the Minister also from the health care need - not to provide health care but that any care that is provided socially, in terms of general well-being, will augur for better health. I know it will help with the health bill, because I know a lot of the issues of the old people can be addressed if you provide the care and the tender loving care for them.

I encourage the Minister to continue, through the National Assistance Board, to train workers and to provide, not just efficient service, but caring service as through the Minister of Family, we will endeavour to raise up a society, once again, that would also be concerned about providing care for its own.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

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

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, I must confess that I find it very difficult to contradict or vary from the very able contribution made by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas, who quite frankly, not only delivered an excellent speech, but who, in many respects, did not herself contradict the Honourable Minister, who introduced this measure.

Mr. Speaker, the narrow import, the narrow purport of this particular legislation is to enlarge the directorship of the National Assistance Board. Sir, inference could be drawn that if you enlarge a body by increasing Committee size, you give the opportunity for a greater amount of input at the level of ideas and a cross-fertilization of some ideas for the betterment of the institution, and that is the type of objective we are hoping for.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas, at no time, either mis-represented the truth nor did she seek to pour cold water on what was said preceding her contribution. Sir, the National Assistance Board would have evolved years ago, created by the Barbados Labour Party to take into account the fact that there are those persons in this community, who are so unfortunate as to need direct help from the State.

12.10 p.m.

The National Assistance Board must have been created sometime between 1979 and 1986. Certainly by 1994 it would have been in full flow. Sir, when we think about the National Assistance Board, we also have to think about poverty and a number of persons in the community who do not get national assistance, who deserve national assistance, but do not get it. We have to find out the reasons why some people are denied.

The Honourable Member for St. Thomas raised the issue of people living on their own in National Assistance Board housing, as is discovered on their death there is lot of confusion over the houses. Sometimes politicians encourage the family of the deceased to go into the house and sometimes Government Departments act very swiftly to take hold of these houses and put them in the pool available to the country as part of State housing.

Sir, an occasion to discuss the National Assistance Board must also be an occasion, certainly for me, to urge Government to do a thorough and full census. There has come the time in this country where there has to be a census. I am sure I am getting the support of the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, the Ambassador, who has taken time off his busy schedule to witness and, I am sure, to take part, in this debate. We need a national census to ascertain the true level of the population in light of recent developments.

We need a national census to determine who has to get an existence out of the informal sector. We need a national census to determine the true level of employment and with it the level of unemployment. We need a national census broken down into gender and age cohorts to see where our people are.

Even though I myself am not honoured today to sit on That Side, it is for me as a Barbadian to encourage That Side to do all that is fit, right and just in the interest of our country.

Sir, your national census must be thorough, and one of the reasons why it must be thorough is that I have fears, which I am going to express, that there could be an underclass of Barbados of between 25 000 and 30 000 people, a veritable under-class, some of whom live on the streets, some of whom live by begging, some of whom have to be drug couriers and drug mules and such like. The level of homelessness is a challenge to the Government.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. Lucy.

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House by trying to give the impression that in one year, those numbers would have accumulated.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please continue.

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, with due respect, at no point so far have I been partisan and I certainly am not attributing any blame to the Democratic Labour Party in its short tenure for these things.

Sir, there are certain systemic problems, as the Honourable Member for St. Philip West and the Honourable Member for St. Michael South would tell you, in this country going back to the days of Grantley Adams and Errol Barrow. We now have to gird ourselves with the courage to be able to put our hands on the many problems that exist, especially those that affect the unfortunate and the working poor.

Sir, where the Honourable Member for Christ Church West Central was right, was when he said, in his discussion on Constituency Councils, that there was some scope to look at national assistance. The two things are not diversified. They are, indeed, related and he is right there.

Sir, we need to watch a phenomenon that I have seen developed in the City of Bridgetown, and in the wider St. Michael area. There are some young men and some young ladies who are struggling to make ends meet. When you investigate their circumstances, some of them have medical problems that have not been addressed and they go to the welfare. When you investigate their circumstances some of them have had flirtations with narcotic drugs and can, with assistance, be helped, but they turn to welfare as a first resort and, therefore, put pressure on the welfare resources.

What we do need as we do our census is to involve institutions to give support to those who are willing to give up the drug life and the drug habit. There are too many people based in the City of Bridgetown, and even in your Constituency, Mr. Speaker, who are below age 40, who are on welfare.

Sir, there are people in this country, in metropolitan Barbados, in the City and surrounding areas, who are on welfare, who should be given rehabilitation and be re-integrated into society after the rehabilitative care has been given to them. That is one of the reasons why I am urging a national census, broken down into categories of age. For example, how many persons between age 17 and 21 are in the informal sector, and unemployed, or on a short-time basis, had to do half-day jobs and such like? How many people in our population are teenage mothers and are unemployable?

Sir, it is hard for me to admit that in my experience I have encountered people who are unemployable and we have to get to the root and the bottom of these problems, because when people get up on mornings and have to face the day, they have to face the day with the assurance that they could have at least two meals, and they can be comfortable in their minds.

We as a Government, driven by an idea of governance, my speech now transcends that of being part of Government, not the narrow part of Government, but the wider part of Government, to that of governance. Governance is about an institutional continuum made up of several component parts which redound to the common wheel. Sir, I am re-using the words "common wheel" as a person who has had some experience in history.

Sir, my good friend, the Honourable Member for St. Philip West, has not yet spoken, but we in here have to watch a growing trend. This is the increase in life expectancy and the increasing number of people who are making it past age 80. A challenge exists to Government to have a policy on 'Aging' and the document cited by the Honourable Member for Christ Church West Central is available, both to this Parliament and to the Government. What you can do as a new Government is going through it with a fine tooth comb, to see the policies that are proposed for those who are aging, but more particularly, to look to see where the State should start and stop when it comes to aging.

Sir, critical to the fact that we are in an aging population, is the fact that we have to look at current pension arrangements at every level. Sir, picture a civil servant retiring five or six years ago, having never ever made a direct contribution to his pension, in financial terms, drawing a pension both from the Civil Service and then from the National Insurance Scheme.

12.20 p.m.

Picture a situation where, as the country ages, the resources of the National Insurance Scheme, notwithstanding their heroic efforts at diversifying their investment portfolio, can be stretched. Therefore, we need as a Parliament to have a policy on pensions where, notwithstanding the fact that the Barbados Labour Party had introduced measures to do with savings, mutual funds and pensions, we have to be sure that from an actuarial perspective, Barbados is well placed to continue an enlightened pension policy.

Sir, there are times when the actuarial approach clashes with the social engineering approach. There are times when the actuarial clashes with the social approach. For example, an actuary from the point of view of being a statistician would look at pensions and tell you that you can only afford to raise pensions by 0.5 per cent or 1 per cent, while persons who are in the Non-Contributory range can only be insulted if you give them a 1 per cent or 2 per cent increase, based on actuarial evidence. Therefore, we are into interesting times, Mr. Speaker, and our census that I am proposing will have to take these variables into account.

One Honourable Member mentioned the question of the quality of housing available. It is a fact that when you go out canvassing house to house, you do come across things that make your skin crawl. We have to be sure that in a situation where international agencies are forever highlighting our achievements, we do not perpetuate any under-class, and that we are not found guilty of not doing enough of poverty alleviation. It is a historical fact that the moment the last Administration of which I was a member, brought the question of poverty alleviation, it suddenly became a front burner issue almost worldwide.

Prior to that, how many countries used to talk about poverty alleviation? Prior to our investigation into certain matters in St. Michael, especially St. Michael North West, where there is some poverty, there were very few countries in the world that looked to the whole question of poverty alleviation, even though in Latin America, for example, you had the very, very poor and at the other end of the spectrum the very, very rich, the same applied to Asia and Africa. We would do well, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we are possessed of the information necessary to ensure that we can plan, because the census I am proposing is going to be the basis of the planning the Government will have to do.

I have no doubt that Honourable Members on the Other Side, as the Government now, are confident that they will be in Government for some time to come. Clearly, there is no intention on This Side to engage in any violent overthrow of the Government, but we want to encourage

the Government to make sure that priorities are evolved and developed.

I want to speak to the question of the huge disparity between public centres for the aged and private centres for the aged. First of all, there is a disparity of cost. The cost of care in a public institution are borne by the State and are new more or less to those who get their public care, but at the other end of the spectrum, you do get privately-owned institutions that charge \$1 200, \$1 500, \$2 000, \$2 500 a month and that is a problem. Sir, you also get the situation where, notwithstanding the very huge fees charged by private centres for old people, that the quality care does not match the quality care provided by Government. Sir, that is a fact.

Mr. Speaker, I know in St. James South there is a Mrs. Cabral who is prepared to give evidence. She was getting ready to give evidence before the Honourable Member for St. Philip West, but then things changed so she now has the opportunity to give evidence before her own Member of Parliament.

Mrs. Cabral, did a study on the treatment of people in privately-owned day care centres and she is of the view that there is a strong element of abuse of some of these people, not only from the point of view of over-charging them, but from the point of view of the quality care they get, Sir, and the odd instance where they are asked to pledge their Title Deeds, proof of property or sometimes to pay huge lump sums of money for the duration of the time they are there.

Mr. Speaker, any census that is implemented, I would like it to identify those young people in Barbados whose lives are badly complicated by the use of marijuana, cannabis and cocaine and, God knows, whatever else, and to see what are the rehabilitation measures. Some of these fellows on the block, who use drugs have told me that they are impressed with the architectural beauty of Glendairy at Station Hill.

Sir, if they are so impressed with the architectural beauty of Glendairy, why not make that a habitat - I think that it is proposed - as an institution to wean people off narcotic psycho tropic substances, get them back to cleanness and sobriety, and re-integrate them into the society.

This should be done soon, because almost with each passing day, you get new persons using narcotic substances, in a situation where some of them actually perish, and in a situation where some of them are at risk of violent behaviour when they do not pay for the substances that they have credited.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the position taken by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas was well researched and well thought out. I would like to assure Honourable Members that even though we can be described for being in power for 14 years, we have done a lot. The Honourable Member for St. George South, the Honourable Member for St. Michael North, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas will testify that we have done a lot.

Sir, this is the problem. Not only was Rome not built in a day, but our system of governance being what it is, is based more on evolution than on revolution, so the Democratic Labour Party Government is bound to uncover files, which show that particular policies were in the pipeline. Then, it is up to the Democratic Labour Party Government either to reform them, to abandon them, or come with their own ideas, in respect of these particular policies.

Clearly, in a situation where we have a lot of people on welfare, and where a lot of people depend on the services of the National Assistance Board, we have to plan to ensure that we bring justice and equity to the whole enterprise on which we have embarked.

The home helpers came about many years ago. A lot of them were properly trained in the early days. I know of some complaints that when the occupants of houses living alone were visited by the home helper, there was some conflict. I personally hate to see people who are old living alone. I hate to see people who are old lacking a support system.

12.30 p.m.

I hate that people who are living alone are being abused. I hate to see people who are living alone surrendering their pension cheques to a relative who then makes off with the money.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister is well-advised - he is not the type of Minister who would reject good advice, the assumption of course is that the advice that is being given is good - to look at the level of training of the home helpers and see what savings can be achieved in terms of efficiencies. I know of one home helper who is assigned to just five or six houses, but she is willing to work in 20 houses.

Mr. Speaker, the programme may have to be expanded, because almost every week you hear about a new person hitting a 100 years, and obviously before they get there, there are many people between age 75 and 85 who need home help.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if what the late Right Excellent Errol Barrow said was not said - I knew he said it

in good faith and he meant it - at a time when we in Barbados should really have reflected on what his import was, when he said that there are people in Barbados who are afraid or ashamed to let people know who their grandmother and grandfather is.

Mr. Speaker, if you assume that the late Right Excellent Errol Barrow was right, then it means that some old people here have relatives who have abandoned them. Mr. Speaker, one Christmas I counted 25 persons in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital who were bound not to have a visitor on Christmas Day. I got a Reverend to agree that he and I would arrange with the hospital to go in on Christmas day at 2.00 p.m. to visit these 25 persons, for to wait to visiting hours to start at 4:00 or 4.30 p.m. would not have given us enough time.

Sir, we visited these 25 people in the hospital and not one of them had seen a relative, even though before Christmas Day some of them were getting visits from relatives. How unkind can we be? By the time we finished our chores after 6.00 p.m. and we checked back, only one of those 25 persons got a visit that day from a relative. That was Christmas Day, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to old people. I am told by some young people that I like old people too much, but clearly the old people have taught me the folk ways of Barbados. As a poor boy growing up in the Holetown area...

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. James Central would know my circumstances very well, better than most people. He and I shared the same Sunday School, which expresses and clearly attests to the fact why we are not in jail. Sir, when you go to Sunday School and you are properly socialised in Sunday School, you do not go into crime, you go to Church.

In fact, there is a seat at St. James Parish Church which the Honourable Member for St. James Central occupies, and if he cannot make it, I occupy it on his behalf. The Honourable Member is so clever that recently there was a service there of a non-constituent of his and a non-constituent of mine and the Priest, so accustomed to seeing him in that seat, still recognised his presence and gave him his due.

Mr. Speaker, we have to look at the National Assistance Board. We have to look at how we treat our old people. We have to be sure that when we are flying the plane or guiding the ship that we are doing so with competence, led by the right type of equipment. In my judgment, the best we can do to be truly social engineers in this Parliament, is to carry out a holistic evaluation by way of a census.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude by saying that there is some concern in Barbados about the level of migrants who are undocumented. There is a concern that many of these migrants work without work permits and do not pay National Insurance. There is some proof that some employers take the passports of these migrant workers and keep them and reduce them to conditions of slavery. Mr. Speaker, a lot of these migrants are Caribbean people, and many of them tell you about free movement.

Mr. Speaker, I remember a simple chap from Guyana telling me that he was of the view that he could stay here, based on the rights of establishment. Mr. Speaker, he was right, because he had his own business. He said that he could find the correct charter within the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas that pointed to his rights of establishment.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding anything that has been said in here today, we should still ensure that Barbados does not go the route of Bolivia. Bolivia has not had a census since 1952, unless they did one in the last year or so. Dominica may be a country that has not had a census for a long time. Barbados should not be in that boat. The census is not to be a paper exercise. The census is not going to be an academic exercise. It is going to be an instrument that should guide policy and help propel this country that we love so much forward.

I thank you.

Mr. SPEAKER: I am obliged.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this Sitting be suspended until 1.45 p.m. today.

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

The question that the Sitting do now suspend until 1.45 p.m. today was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER suspended the Sitting accordingly.

12.40 p.m.

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER: This House is resumed. Honourable Members, when the Suspension was taken, we were on the matter of the National Assistance Board (Amendment) Bill, 2009. To that we will now revert.

The Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this Bill before this Honourable House and to say at the onset that if we look at the Schedule to the Bill at Section 3, it indicates the Members of the National Assistance Board. At Sub-section 3(c), it specifies that:

“The members of the Board shall include:

“The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry responsible for National Assistance, ex officio, or the nominee of the Permanent Secretary.”

This Amendment to the Bill that increases the size of the National Assistance Board would regularise an anomaly which obtained in the past, such that it was not mandatory for the Ministry with responsibility, namely the Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment and Urban Development, to be represented on the Board. Therefore, I welcome this addition to the Board, to ensure that the Ministry has proper oversight in the running of affairs of the statutory body within its portfolio, which is customary in other statutory Boards. Sir, this should be noted.

Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure that the relationship between the Statutory Board and the parent Ministry is clearly enunciated to such an extent, that communication is effective and efficient, it is imperative that the Ministry by right should have a representative sitting on these Boards, to communicate with the Minister and other staff, to ensure that the work of the Board is effective, efficient and as timely as is humanly possible.

Mr. Speaker, in talking about the National Assistance Board, I listened attentively to the Honourable Members on the Other Side. Sir, the Honourable Member for St. James North, as an elder Honourable Member of this Honourable House, is able to speak and one would get the impression that the Barbados Labour Party is speaking in a sort of sanitised environment, where no blame could be attributed to their Administration. Sir, nothing could be further than the truth.

1.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if one puts perfume on a stench, the stench is still there. Sir, the public should not be in any way fooled into thinking that the Barbados Labour Party's record in relation to the social services is impeccable.

Indeed, talking about the National Assistance Board, I have been asked by the Honourable Prime Minister to serve as Minister of State within the Ministry of Social Care for the first few months of our Administration and I would have worked along with the substantive Minister, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East, as we sought to really address the lack of attention paid by the

Barbados Labour Party Administration to the social services sector and, in this particular regard, the National Assistance Board.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the morale of the staff and the administrators in the Ministry and the National Assistance Board, in general, was low. We got the distinct impression that the Barbados Labour Party Administration, in the last 14 years, prior to the 2008 General Election, neglected the National Assistance Board and starved it of the necessary funds to effectively deliver its mandate to service the needs of the vulnerable groups within our community, primarily the aged and the indigenous.

They got the distinct impression that this attitude was led by the Prime Minister of the day, the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter. Sir, he was Minister of Finance and controlled the allocation of funds for the relevant Ministries, including the National Assistance Board.

Mr. Speaker, we had a situation where, for example, the van, which was utilised by the National Assistance Board to transport the home helpers and other staff to access the homes in remote districts was as ancient as the aged that it served to service. The van was an embarrassment to the National Assistance Board, a hazard, and this is what this Democratic Labour Party inherited. We addressed that assiduously and that is a thing of the past.

We recognised that there was even need to provide a further vehicle so that, as Honourable Members mentioned earlier, there is an excess of senior citizens out there, who are waiting to be serviced in the provision of home helpers to their households and, especially in remote areas, which are not accessible to the normal Transport Board or other public transportation.

Sir, where that service is inadequate, then the National Assistance Board is not able to provide home help unless transportation can be provided by the National Assistance Board. Sir, we in the Democratic Labour Party appreciate these important logistical issues.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the Barbados Labour Party Government treated the National Assistance Board with scant disregard. Sir, apart from that van, you had the Home Help Service where, as the Minister, the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West pointed out, the Democratic Labour Party inherited a situation in which the Barbados Labour Party Administration had hurriedly hired an excess of a few dozen additional home helpers, without the necessary provisions being made in the Estimates, so that the staff of the National Assistance Board and the Ministry were hard-pressed to serve all over to find funds to pay those additional staff members.

We in the Democratic Labour Party Government had to address this as a matter of urgency so as not to send home those few dozen relief home helpers. It was an election year and it was expedient for the Barbados Labour Party to keep the unemployment figures down, but clearly there was no well sought-out plan to fund those additional home helpers.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the Minister at the time, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East, myself and the entire new Board of the National Assistance Board as well as the senior staff, met at the Prince Cave Hall, at District "A" Police Station early in our Administration, with the 700 home helpers, including their senior supervisors, and we heard directly from these workers the fact that they had not been able to interact with the Minister and senior staff to that extent in a long time, and we were able to hear their pressing concerns.

For example, the fact that a number of these home helpers were not provided with uniforms, were wearing tattered uniforms with the crest of the National Assistance Board and, clearly, the moral was at an all time low, and we addressed it as a matter of emergency.

Sir, there was a lack of shoes and security of tenure. Many of them were working two days or three days a week and could not get an appointment letter they could take to a bank to enable them to get a simple bank loan. Therefore, they did not feel as though their future was secured under the Government of the Barbados Labour Party.

There was inadequate training and an excess of workers, who were willing to take the course in Care of the Elderly, yet the waiting list was long, because the Government of the Barbados Labour Party did not see it as necessary to train these home helpers so that they would be able to, in a clinical and scientific way, address the needs of the elderly persons they would have to service, in a professional way. Sir, the Barbados Labour Party neglected these persons.

Mr. Speaker, we agree that there is a need for greater supervision of the home helpers yet, at that same meeting, Mr. Speaker, we heard supervisors complained that they were being paid by the Barbados Labour Party Government just a few cents more than the home helpers themselves. They were so short of staff that they themselves had to act as home helpers in terms of cooking for the elderly, cleaning and so on, because they were short of staff and had to chip in. Sir, morale was at an all-time low.

Mr. Speaker, we, in the Democratic Labour Party took the bull by the horns. We have made a clear assessment of these pressing issues and have executed and initiated measures to ensure that these are addressed in a timely manner. Sir, this affects the quality of care being

provided by the Government and, Sir, we as a caring Government appreciate this.

In fact, when you look at our Manifesto, you would see that we have in two sections of the Manifesto, addressed the concerns of the elderly. For example, on page 17, of our 2008 Manifesto, in the section entitled “Treasuring Our Seniors in their Golden Years”, we say that the Democratic Labour Party is committed to caring for all Barbadians in their senior years, and that a new Democratic Labour Party would introduce a deductible allowance for nursing home fees and expenses, and encourage senior citizens to use the community resource centre for training and recreation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the Honourable Member for St. James North would have read our Manifesto and that he would have been talking about the need to pay attention to nursing homes. Sir, what we are saying, in a tangible way, is that we pledge to assist those persons, who would have to provide nursing care at private establishments to their seniors and within their household, by giving them an allowance within the Income Tax regime so that it would be affordable and accessible to working-class Barbadians and middle-income Barbadians.

Mr. Speaker, there used to be a problem at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where many beds were being occupied by senior citizens, who were medically fit to return to their homes, but their families had abandoned them. We are addressing this concern by enabling and assisting those persons who may wish to get assistance for their relatives to be accommodated in private nursing homes and, Sir, we are providing the necessary financial facilities to allow this to be feasible and practical.

2.00 p.m.

In another section of our Manifesto, under Social Security, the last safety net, pages 20 and 21 of our 2008 Manifesto, we go further. The whole philosophy of the Democratic Labour Party in relation to the social services is very clear. It says:

“A caring Government puts in place a final safety net to ensure that no citizen for whatever reason falls through the cracks into abject poverty and despair.”

Sir, we agree that the people may be affected by the scourge of drug abuse and crime, and who may end up being homeless in Bridgetown or other places. We have not abandoned them like the Barbados Labour Party Government. I said that they neglected them.

For example, under the ambit of the National Assistance Board lies the Sir Clyde Shelter, Hindsbury Road, in your Constituency, Mr. Speaker. This new

Administration found that Shelter woefully under-supplied to the extent, mainly males who seek shelter there, come to me weekly, at my clinic, and complain about vermin infestation. They complain about not having meals.

One would imagine that proper care would mandate and dictate that these persons be given at least two meals, one on evenings when they come in to sleep and breakfast. Sir, do you know that under the Barbados Labour Party Government this was not given? In fact, it was the good will of private companies and businesses, that actually provided meals, but not consistently as they contracted, due to economic limitations. They were not guaranteed a daily meal.

Sir, I brought this up early as we met with the National Assistance Board staff, and made it very clear that the Government has to step in and ensure, with the partnership of the private sector, that these basic social human rights are provided to these homeless, be they recovering addicts, alcohol, narcotic, deportees or homeless. These people are vulnerable and should not be marginalised by a caring society.

Sir, you may have seen this on the television, a regional production which is being aired on Channel 8 in recent weeks, where in this documentary scientific analysis has been done in Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago, which found that the incidence of HIV infection among the homeless in those countries is over 70 per cent. These persons are vulnerable and they must be provided with assistance from the State. They do not live on an island.

We used to have Pelican Island as a quarantine island in earlier days and we do not even have that. We all live on this little rock called Barbados and we must be our brother's keeper, not just in words, but in deeds. This is clearly enunciated within the Democratic Labour Party's Manifesto of 2008, Page 20:

“Since Independence a considerable amount of resources and structures have been put in place to support the most vulnerable in society and those who through misfortune cannot earn a living.”

Sir, we noticed that under the Barbados Labour Party Government, they used the social services or lack of access to polarise and discriminate, so that if you were not a card-carrying member, or a supporter of the Barbados Labour Party, you were pressurised and often denied access to the basic services. We mentioned this in our Manifesto:

“... that only party faithfuls gained easy access to benefits while others were frustrated in getting what were theirs by virtue of being citizens of Barbados. The polarisation and corruption of the work of these

organisations have resulted in the unnecessary suffering of many Barbadians.”

We said that we are going to put a stop to this rot.

On Page 20:

“A Democratic Labour Party Administration will ensure that benefits will be given to eligible welfare recipients as a human right and not as patronising handouts by the rich and powerful who consider that superior to the masses of Barbadian.”

Sir, it does not surprise us, the approach of the Barbados Labour Party. Mr. Speaker, I heard the Honourable Member for St. Peter on the radio at a Branch Meeting recently, referring to your humble servant asking why I am talking about assets as if I have any. Do you understand that condescending arrogant approach of the Barbados Labour Party enunciated by none other than the former Prime Minister? That is what we alluded to in our Manifesto.

We are not a right wing conservatory Party as we say the Barbados Labour Party is. We care about the masses of people. They are Barbadians too and I appeal to the public to appreciate the philosophical and ideological difference between the Democratic Labour Party, progressive democratic socialist, and the conservative right wing Barbados Labour Party. Sir, we are very happy to have been given the mandate by the public, to carry forward the people of Barbados in unity and love.

Mr. Speaker, we will be injecting more funding to transform the Clyde Gollop Shelter, so that it can cater more meaningfully to Barbadians in general, those vulnerable groups. Therefore, I take the opportunity to congratulate those people in the private sector, who have come forward to assist in terms of feeding people. There are people who feed the homeless at Queen’s Park on a daily basis. There are some Church-based groups who come in their vehicles daily, park at Heroes Square and feed those people, kudos to them.

The Salvation Army has been doing a wonderful job and this is what the Honourable Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, is talking about, philanthropy, where good-natured Barbadians of means abroad, can come and assist the vulnerable groups, that they are people too. When they suffer, the country suffers. A chain is as strong as its weakest link. Let us all help each other so that we can have a strong chain of social structure within our society.

Sir, the neglect goes on. We assumed office in January 2008 and we heard horrendous stories, under the Barbados Labour Party Government, close to the last General Elections. The National Assistance Board would

have initiated a Hamper Programme and donations would have been collected, thousands of food stuff stored at the National Assistance Board and in the dead of the night, we hear from the staff, that this foodstuff disappeared.

Asides.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: So the Barbados Labour Party must explain where did the foodstuff go that was supposed to go to the vulnerable people of Barbados. To some extent those people at the National Assistance Board do not want to hear about hampers. They are so afraid of that nasty stench of corruption under the Barbados Labour Party Government, but those days are ending, thank the Lord, because those people woke up, smelt the stench of the Barbados Labour Party Administration and voted them out of office. Sir, we are going to expose everything. We are not hiding anything. The record must reflect the realities of the wonton neglect and corruption under the Barbados Labour Party Government.

Sir, I would go further, but I know that others would want to speak and we have other business to go into.

For example, the “Assistance in Time Programme” is a programme under the aegis of the National Assistance Board where vulnerable persons, not just the seniors but people with disabilities, the indigent, that is the very poor, could access refrigerators, beds, stoves and dining room furniture. Sir, do you know that the Barbados Labour Party Government starved the National Assistance Board of funds to the extent that the “Assistance in Kind Programme” was severely handicapped? So the waiting list of hundreds of people, whom the Democratic Labour Party Government found waiting for years to get urgent assistance, in kind, from the National Assistance Board, but could not receive due to the lack of interest paid by the Barbados Labour Party Government, including their Prime Minister, but gone are those days.

2.10 p.m.

Sir, swiftly, the new Administration met with the other agencies to work in a seamless way to coordinate the work of the Welfare Department and the National Assistance Board, to ensure that there is no duplication, so that any savings, any excess of funds available in one department can be transferred to another and there are clear lines of demarcation.

We have set the necessary systems in place, to ensure that urgent assistance is being provided to propel the Assistance-in-Kind Programme, so that these hundreds of Barbadians waiting for this assistance will be given assistance as a matter of urgency.

The Honourable Member for St. Michael South East mentioned the Bereavement Programme. Again, this is under the ambit of the National Assistance Board. I congratulate their Deputy Director, Miss Diane Sobers, for her excellent work. I remember last year Easter Sunday when there was a fire at Constitution Road, where a building was being rented out in rooms. There were at least 10 different households affected, and one fatality.

I spent practically the whole day that Easter Sunday down there and, quickly, Miss Sobers from Bereavement Support within the National Assistance Board, Deputy Director as she is, she came down there and she was able to counsel those people who were traumatized. I congratulate her and the work of the National Assistance Board.

Mr. Speaker, that brings me to talk about the reduction in duplication, as we said, because there may be other agencies in relation to the Ministry of Health providing that service, and the Barbados Labour Party Government would have been bringing in consultants, left, right and centre to address these issues.

Sir, rather than create duplication, we are seeking to have a seamless Government where we can pool resources and we know that there can be co-ordination across Ministries, and this is why we have set up sub-committees of Cabinet.

Therefore, the Social Services Sub-committee of Cabinet, headed by the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West as Minister of Social Care, includes the Minister of Education, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, the Minister of Family, Youth and Sports, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Housing, and the Attorney-General, so that we can coordinate our activities. An example is the provision of care to the elderly, because within the Ministry of Health, the alternative tier of the elderly programme is similar to what we have in social care. Therefore, rather than have duplications, we are working together as a co-ordinated group.

Sir, understand that we are revolutionising the approach to Government and governance in our country to reduce wastage, to reduce duplication, to create greater efficiency, which in the final analysis will ensure that there will be better Government, and more tangible resources and results being provided to the public.

Mr. Speaker, in winding up I would just like to say also that the Senior Games is under the National Assistance Board's responsibility and we had the elements in the Barbados Labour Party seeking to match up those Games. They did all within their power to try to stop the Games being held last year.

I thank people like Rawle Clarke and others within the Ministry, that rose above partisan politics and ensured that we worked together in the few weeks we had left to plan this and we ensured that a well-executed Senior Games were held. Sir, we pledge to continue this work which helps to increase the longevity of the seniors in our country by encouraging them to be active and to be engaged in athletics.

We have people in their 80s who are doing very well in these Senior Games. We have a senior team that went to the World Senior Games in Utah, a rich State in the United States of America. Sir, we are world-class. We won the largest numbers of medals there and we can, therefore, work with the Ministry of Tourism to ensure that we use this instrument to encourage those Americans to come down here and visit Barbados. They are in awe to see this little island producing these world-class athletes, beating athletes from all around the world.

Sir, this Democratic Labour Party Government is serious about assisting the vulnerable groups, and we pledge to continue to work to the best of our ability to keep the narrow partisan discrimination that would turn a blind eye to corruption and inaccessibility to these vital services to the public. We believe in being a caring Government and each one matters.

I thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for St. Lucy.

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this Bill. Sir, from the outset, I want to say that it is good to see that some amendment has come to the National Assistance Board, but I am hoping that we are not only dealing with a paper amendment, Sir, but that real change will come to this Board.

Mr. Speaker, today we are dealing with the number of members on the Board. I want to remind the Minister that there are people who have been working there for a long time, for three days a week, but have not been able to enjoy the privilege of working five days a week, but these persons have seen people who came after them working for five days a week. I am saying that if we are about change, that too will have to change.

It is no doubt, Sir, that this job at the National Assistance Board which is done by these workers, that for some reason, the Barbados Labour Party treated this as if it was some kind of minor work, because they were dealing with the older folks of Barbados. Sir, what they regard as old people in Barbados, we regard as experienced people and these are the persons who have built Barbados. They do not owe us anything. Furthermore, than they owing us

anything, Mr. Speaker, we owe them something, because they are the ones who would have built Barbados off the sweat of their backs and they deserve to be treated much better.

I heard a lot of talk in this House today, Sir, about young people not wanting to live with these old folks. It is not true. Sir, under the Barbados Labour Party, if you were old and you had young people living with you, they would tell you that you could not get certain services, because young people are living in the house too. I am saying that is wrong.

I am telling the Minister that he has to change that and instead of these old people having to leave their homes or the homes provided for them by the Government, that the young people should be encouraged to live with these people.

Furthermore, instead of having to look for missing houses, these young people should be allowed to buy the houses after the old people pass away, because anybody who understands chattel housing in Barbados would know that under the plantocracy, they said two moves are just as bad as a fire. This means that when you give an old person a house, and then you have to move and carry it somewhere else, with that first move, you are damaging the house.

Therefore, it is better for the National Assistance Board to sell that house to the family that would have been looking after the particular old person than to move that house to give to somebody and then have to turn around and spend just as much money as if you build a new house.

Asides.

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: I am saying that the Democratic Labour Party must be about change and when we speak about change, Sir, we are speaking about real change.

It does not make sense for us to be forking out money giving old folks, and then because the money is not enough, for some politician to get \$1 million or \$2 million to provide food, create a soup kitchen to look after old people. Sir, after they have worked all these years of their lives, they are told that they cannot get a Non-Contributory Pension - listen to this one - but they must turn up at a politician's door and a politician should turn up with a plate of food for our old people. I am saying that is wrong, too.

Mr. Speaker, we should give them the Non-Contributory Pension, so that they could join with the young person living in the house, and they could get a proper meal, without having to believe that they have some obligation to a politician, because they bring a share of food for them on a daily basis. Sir, do not believe that this

was by mistake. The policy was to starve them and then make them beg and get the vote.

Asides.

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: Sir, look at it and you will see. Sir, they drive you into submission, make you dependent on them, and then you must deliver by giving them the vote in return.

2.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if there were two politicians in this world I had a lot of time for, they were the late Right Excellent Errol Barrow and Mr. Don Blackman.

Mr. Don Blackman once said in this House or somewhere in Barbados - let me clarify this one because I am not sure of the location and I do not tell lies deliberately - that the reason the Barbados Labour Party - and this all has to do with social dealings in Barbados - put Barbadian women under the pill was because they had a plan to deal with them.

Sir, that bothered me for years until I was listening to a call-programme a couple Sundays ago and heard that what we want in Barbados is an expansion of population. Mr. Speaker, could you imagine that the Barbados Labour Party decreased the population and now they want to increase it by bringing in people from outside.

Asides.

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: Which Barbados Labour Party said what? You mean which Barbados Labour Party criticised the policy.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, are you still addressing the Chair?

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: Of course, I am addressing the Chair by helping the Honourable Member.

Sir, it was clear to me that Don Blackman knew what was happening in the engine room. He spoke out against it and those of us who studied it, suddenly realised, even though it has taken us rather long, but we are now seeing the evidence...

Mr. SPEAKER: There is a point of order, Honourable Member.

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

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND: On a point of order. What the person quoted said was that family planning worked in such a way as to control the black race and if the black race was controlled to a point where there was no marginal increase in the black race, then other races could come and out-number the black race of Barbados. That is what Don Blackman was saying.

Mr. SPEAKER: That is a point of elucidation.

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Member for St. James North. As I said, I was not in the engine room and I would never be in the engine room, so you heard it directly from the engine room.

Mr. Speaker, I am also concerned that there are some relatives who do not want to have anything to do with some of these old folks. Sir, I agree with those who say that the only thing they want from them is the cheque or their property. Mr. Speaker, there are also other persons who are quite happy to work with them, but because of Government policy they are deprived from being able to contribute, because if they get too close, they would be penalising the experienced persons around them.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say something to some men called the "three-card men". Sir, I had a run-in once down Broad Street with them, which I would never forget. One Tuesday I left Parliament and as I was walking up Broad Street, I saw an old man who just came out of the bank and three men approached him and said they are ready, and I said: "Grandpa, come." One man got so angry with me, he told me he would beat me. I said: "My man, you are testing the wrong man today because you are not going to interfere with my grandfather."

Sir, every old person in Barbados is my grandfather or grandmother and I have a right to protect them. The guy walked beside us and I told him he could walk as much as he likes, but one man he is not going to touch today is this one here, or he is not touching him because he is not getting his money.

Sir, there are persons who lay-wait these persons and take every cent from them, and then send them back into the banks for more, and they extract that money from them as well. Sir, we have an obligation to protect these persons.

Mr. Speaker, the same treatment meted out to them by the "three-card men" was indirectly meted out to them by the Barbados Labour Party under what they called a social policy that was not very social to old people.

Mr. Speaker, I keep telling people that anything I have to say, I ensure that it is written somewhere or it is documented in Hansard.

Mr. Speaker, old people are regarded as part of the disabled, because after they get to a certain stage in life, you will find them having the same problem, not being able to board the buses in a particular way.

Sir, when the Barbados Labour Party came to this House to buy five buses for the disabled, I told them that it was a waste of time buying five buses, because they would not have been able to allocate these five buses to serve the needs of old people and the disabled in this country. I said to them that it would have been better to ensure that when they are purchasing buses they buy buses that everybody could get on, and I was told that was not possible. Sir, I now know that it was the biggest lie ever told at that time.

Asides.

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: I am not talking about this present Parliament, so do not get too frightened, Sir.

Sir, I have been able to witness in the United States of America and in Hawaii that you do not have to buy special buses for these people, that you can have your normal buses and with a minimal amount of cost you could do the conversions to accommodate everybody. All you have to do is to ensure that the sidewalks are right.

Sir, I have said this already to the Minister of Transport and Works because they got some technocrats - and politicians sometimes get a lot of blame - who believe that certain things can only be purchased from certain people.

Mr. Speaker, I am sending a warning now that any new buses coming into Barbados should be for everybody. I am saying that when a bus comes to a bus stop, anybody should be able to get on that bus. There should be no special buses in Barbados. Sir, when you look at the cost, it does not make sense buying special buses when you could get the normal buses much cheaper, but it depends on where you want to go and sometimes people like to go far, because they know why. We have to understand that we have to look after the old folks in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we have a way in this country, and I keep making this point, of looking at revenue, not at foreign exchange. Sir, if you look at the type of persons who cannot now get a non-contributory pension, you would find that they are the people who work in the field, the people who went fishing, persons who work the small plots for small farmers in Barbados and domestic servants. Sir, the domestic servants are the ones who would have been in the house to ensure that the rich people children were looked after.

Sir, the biggest problem facing this country is that there are too many snobs in it. As soon as they get over, they believe that because they could do something, they must punish the people who looked after them.

Mr. Speaker, we have to take the snobbery out of people. Sometimes you would love for everybody to get rich, but some people forget where they come from, they forget their grandparents and they forget that they used to eat breadfruit.

As soon as they start to eat steak, they do not care about people eating breadfruit anymore, so everything is predicated based on the whiskey taste. They no longer want anything to do with mauby. The people drinking mauby should be hidden in a back room and no money should be spent on them, but the ones drinking whiskey should be looked after. Mr. Speaker, that is wrong, because it is the people who drink mauby that save foreign exchange in this country so that they could drink whiskey.

Mr. Speaker, it is matters like these that would get me angry, because we have to understand that this country was not built by us. We are now contributing to it. This country was built by those persons who would have sweated in the fields for many days, nights and years in the hot sun and sometimes even in the dew of the night trying to build this country.

Sir, we have now forgotten all of that and we are now treating old people as if they are some liability to us when by right, they should now be living off the interest that they would have created in this society.

2.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying those people are not old, they are experienced people. Sir, because we have neglected them, there is a lot of knowledge we should have gained from them, which we cannot now gain because we are now too "big up" and too great to get that knowledge.

Mr. Speaker, this Democratic Labour Party is not about a soup kitchen. It has to be about giving money back to the old people. Sir, not only is it about giving money back, it is about giving them their fair return because they would have worked hard for it. That is why you would have seen foundations being set up and some people running around Constituencies on Sundays, giving old people a share of food and bragging about it on political platforms.

Sir, the most insulting thing in the world is to give somebody a share of food and then to talk about it. It is insulting to be highlighting it as though it is something big. Sir, one thing you do not do is ever to give somebody something to eat and then talk about it. Sir, for someone to

do that would mean that person does not have any moral grounding. Sir, we then use the Treasury of Barbados to help prop up this type of ignorance. I am saying those days must be over.

I would hate to see the day the Minister of Finance allocates money to Parliamentarians to create soup kitchens to feed my people in this country. I want to see the Minister of Finance ensuring that he has created the atmosphere where after these people have finished building this country, there is something from which they could draw and not to have come to politicians for handouts.

Sir, for too long we have suffered the old or experienced folk. Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that those persons were fortunate enough to reach old age. Sir, I do not know how many of those persons to whom I am referring would get the chance to enjoy being old, because the burden on their conscience for the wrongs they have done to these old or experienced persons in this country, might be such that they might not get past the age of 60.

Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that as a race we have to learn to share and to understand how the foundation has been built for us. If we cannot appreciate how the foundation has been built for us, then we cannot appreciate where we are going. Sir, in life, like every thing else, there must be a base and there must be a top. It is something I have always said: "In life, there is something called the 'three steps'". If the first step is wrong, then everything else would be wrong. Therefore, if the primary is wrong, then the secondary and tertiary would have to be wrong.

Mr. Speaker, if you could only look after me now, it means that I could understand what you would do with me later, because the same way you have treated the old people before, my time will come and you would want to treat me the same way. Therefore, do not fool me that you are going to treat them in a particular way and when it comes to me, that you are going to treat me differently. I understand the game.

Mr. Speaker, I support an increase of Board Members, but I also want to see better treatment for the experienced people of Barbados. I also want to see better treatment for those persons who worked with the experienced people of Barbados.

Sir, you cannot have people working for 14 years, telling them they have worked and when you look, they are only working three days a week, then you are bragging and saying that unemployment is down to 7 per cent, when everybody knows that the educational system of this country has been used well to reduce the unemployment statistics of this country.

Sir, if you are studying, you cannot be unemployed, and therefore, you expand the Barbados Community College and the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic. If you do all those things and do not include the 35 000 Guyanese who are living in the country as part of the census.... That is why I support the Honourable Member for St. James North that we need a census, which is something I have been calling for all the time.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to know our social cost in this country and how it is being impacted upon, we have to know the true population in this country, that is why I have previously made the comment that for the Minister of Finance to truly budget in this country, he has to know for whom to budget. It does not make sense budgeting for a population of 280 000 people, when the true population might be 315 000, because you are going to be 35 000 persons short every time you budget, and you would always be in a deficit.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that it is better for the Minister of Finance to find out the population is 315 000 and to budget for that 315 000, than to budget for

280 000, then to find that it is 315 000 persons. Sir, according to good accounting principles, it is better to over-state your expenditure than to over-state your revenue.

Mr. Speaker, I have no problem in supporting this Bill, but I want to see not only the number of Members of the Board changed, I would want to see the Board Members changed and for them to have a better heart. Sir, what we would have seen for the last 14 years or so, this state of union cannot continue.

What we need to see is real change. This change must be reflected, not only in talk, but in the change of Government, and I have confidence in the Minister in making that real change because the Minister knows that if he does not bring about that change, I will continue to humbug him. The Honourable Member knows that when I am on an issue, I remain on that particular issue. The Honourable Member knows that I will continue to remind him that he has promised me that he would look after the old people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

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

His Honour K. St.C. BEST: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this Bill before this Honourable House. Sir, I am glad to see that with regard to the National Assistance Board, the Honourable Minister has indicated that changes will come to that Board.

Sir, I want to support my colleague, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, who indicated that not only does he want to see changes come to the Board, but that he wants to see changes come to the total Administration of the National Assistance Board.

Sir, for too long that particular Department has been bastardised by political lackeys, and the easiest way out of a crisis is for someone to say they need a job at the National Assistance Board, in circumstances where persons have no formal training whatsoever. When those persons receive that job at the National Assistance Board, we find situations where they treat the elderly with scant respect, because of the fact that these workers do not have the knowledge or know-how to treat to the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, where would we start with these reforms? I believe we need to have day-care centres in each Constituency, where elderly persons living in these areas would be able to go to these centres during the day, where they would be looked after by their peers. These elderly persons would be able to mingle with others there. At the end of the day, they would be taken back home, instead of being left at home alone, being locked away by themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge the Minister to ensure that comes about in each Constituency in Barbados where there are day-care centres. Sir, too often, those elderly persons would have produced off-springs who would have moved from being poor to the middle-class and to the upper middle-class. Sir, I would want to say too that some people forget where they came from.

Mr. Speaker, I am one of those persons who come from poor circumstances, but I have never forgotten where I came from. Sir, I would communicate with my mother every day when she was alive. I would make sure that I get up early every morning, go to St. Andrew and bring her boxes of vegetables to the market, because it was because of her caring love that I have reached this area of my life.

2.40 p.m.

Sir, in addition to having these day care centres, we need to have vehicles, equipped to collect elderly persons and to take them to the centres and back. I am sure that the people, who are in the higher economic bracket, whose parents go to the centres during the day, will contribute and take some of the burden off Government. I am sure those persons would be happy if a programme such as this is put in place by the Government that they will ensure that these centres are ran correctly.

Sir, these are the ways that I believe that changes should come to the National Assistance Board. They need to be given the opportunities to interact with their peers and

we need to have specialised training for workers, because the care of the elderly is a specialised area.

Mr. Speaker, we could use the service of retired nurses who would have gone through the system and cared for elderly persons, while they were working in hospitals, either here or overseas. We need to tap into those fertile brains, so that we would be in a position to provide adequate and proper service for those elderly persons in Barbados. In addition, we need to expand the training programme of the Care of the Elderly. It makes no sense having one programme at the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic to cater for the whole island.

Mr. Speaker, this is what we need to do. If you are coming from Christ Church, there should be a cut-off point where you have a centre and where persons in that area are trained to look after the elderly. If you are coming from St. Philip, you should come to Six Cross Roads and, if there is a programme, either at the school or at community centres in that area, there should be collaboration with the programme at the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, so that we would have more persons cared for in the care of the elderly.

Sir, if some persons say they want a job at the National Assistance Board to care for the elderly with no training, we should be able to educate the people who want to work with the elderly, so that they would be equipped to work with them.

Mr. Speaker, if you are looking at the care of the elderly, you must also look at their living conditions. I am sure that each and every Member of Parliament, on Both Sides, would recognise that in every Constituency, there are some poor living conditions, and that the persons who reside in those houses are the persons who would have made significant contribution to the development of Barbados, and that the third and fourth generation of these persons would not have taken the opportunity to have the estates of these persons administered.

Sir, then they are faced with the challenge to have repairs done to the house, where either the Urban Development Commission or Rural Development Commission says they cannot do repairs to the houses because they do not know the true owners.

Sir, I believe the time has come that we need to look carefully at some system, where those people, who have resided there and have made a contribution to the development of Barbados, should live in conditions suitable for human beings, and not in conditions where you wonder how they survive in these conditions.

Mr. Speaker, I must support the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, when he speaks about the question of houses

passing on from one generation to another. Sir, if elderly persons are catered for by the off-springs and the off-springs are in a position to purchase those houses, then the Government has money to move on to build houses for some person else, instead of the Government having to move that house and having to spend money to get it to a situation where it becomes habitable for those persons for whom it is intended. Sir, I believe those types of things need to happen. We said we were the Government for change and change must come by a revolutionary system.

Mr. Speaker, there must be ways and means to do this. We heard constituents say to us that the Urban Development Commission messed up their house 10 years or 15 years ago, and when the investigation is done, because of the nature of the legislation and the bureaucracy, nothing can be done to the houses because, it is the policy that nothing can happen to the house, because the Urban Development Commission or the Rural Development Commission cannot build houses on land of which they are not sure.

Mr. Speaker, the occupant of the house says it is the house of the grand-parent, that they have not done anything in terms of the Administration of the estate and, Sir, that should not be a hindrance to the process. If you are going to make changes, changes come in various forms and we must look at the working conditions of those workers.

Mr. Speaker, every day you hear the cries of the workers of the National Assistance Board complaining of their working conditions. Sir, not the working conditions on the road, because some of the working conditions on the road are untenable, but the working conditions, the pressure, neglect and the disrespect by their superiors.

Sir, that is what is happening at the National Assistance Board every day. Sir, it has happened for the last 14 years and I will not stop speaking about it until I see change. I hope the Minister would understand that he must bring about change to understand the welfare of the worker and the welfare of the recipients of those workers.

Asides.

His Honour K. St. C. BEST: Mr. Speaker, now it is the question of the Meals-on-Wheels Programme. Sir, there are political programmes by organisations that believe they are NGOs and they care for the elderly.

Sir, within St. Michael East, there was a 'Meals-on-Wheels' Programme, but the vehicle that delivers that programme was off the road for the last three years. Sir, it was run by the Israel Lovell Foundation and it was run by the Constituency office of the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East, Undene Whittaker, with the road taxes expired for the last two years when Elections were called.

Sir, this is the kind of thing that is happening in Barbados. I am sure, that up to now, there is no Meals-on-Wheels Programme existing, but they are getting a subvention from Government and, Sir, that must come to an end.

Mr. Speaker, we need to understand that it is time for political hand-outs to come to an end. Sir, the Barbados Labour Party has created an atmosphere of beggars in this country under the guise of all sorts of fanciful names and the average citizen, the poor and the needy, continue to suffer under the Barbados Labour Party.

Sir, then they had the audacity, the tenacity and the gall to get up in this House of Assembly to advise the Democratic Labour Party about the things that should be done in respect of the care of the elderly. Sir, they must understand that change has come and that change will continue.

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, there are senior persons at the National Assistance Board, vulnerable ladies, applying for a job at the National Assistance Board and their bodies become a contract of service under the former Barbados Labour Party Administration. I would hope that the day would come when the police take action. They walk this country with their chests puffed up, giving people the impression that they have done so much for the care of the elderly.

Do you know what amazes me? The Honourable Member for St. Thomas has all these fanciful ideas about caring for the elderly, but had the audacity to get up in this Honourable House today and say, that she drove past a house that was shut up for 10 years and did nothing about it. It belonged to the Rural Development Commission and the National Assistance Board did nothing to it, and you wondered why it was vandalised.

Sir, they have the temerity and guts to come in here and speak about how the houses should be allocated, and talked about missing houses. Sir, if you go to Woodbourne and turn to come down, you will see a National Assistance Board house carrying on business. It is a Branch Office.

I live at Lot 23, Shawwood, Heddings, at my property and the roads there were not destroyed by me. I am sure that when \$34 000 000 was allocated to repair roads in St. Philip I was the benefactor of such. I want the Barbados Labour Party to take note of what is happening in Barbados, to understand that the people of Barbados spoke by their X, in no uncertain terms.

Sir, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas, earlier this week, spoke about the Act, that we are trying to bring it into force to deprive persons of their right to vote. There

has been no change to the Constitution in this House of Assembly, under the Democratic Labour Party, in this Session.

One needs to understand that in order to speak on a particular subject, and you do not know, you ask questions or read. Am I going in the right direction when I speak about people trying to deprive people the right to vote in this country? Those are the things that must happen.

Asides.

His Honour K. St.C. BEST: Sir, a carpenter would never speak about masonry. Every time you get up in this Honourable House and speak, the Barbados Labour Party talks about buying votes. That is their nature. That is their practice. That is the antecedent that travels with the Barbados Labour Party. When the Honourable Member for St. Thomas spoke about Adult Suffrage and the right to vote, it was never said that in order to get the vote you must buy it. Do you understand?

Sir, because of their practice, every time you knock on a person's house: 'What do you have to offer? My vote is for sale. For 14 years they bastardised this country with that kind of behaviour, but only if the police had done their job some of them would not be in here, because they would have been charged under the Offence of the Election Act.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, I did not stop you before because...

His Honour K. St.C. BEST: Mr. Speaker, those remarks are withdrawn. I am saying that changes occurred on January 15. Changes are on the way for the National Assistance Board, and I am sure that the cries of persons who say that they are only getting one day or three days, will be heard, for this programme shall traverse all 30 Constituencies of Barbados, rather than selecting a few, like the Barbados Labour Party had it.

Sir, that is why I said that training must be not only at the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, but at Community Centres in cooperation with the persons of the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic to run those programmes so that people would not have to traverse from St. Philip to St. Lucy to look after the elderly, but would take care of people in their own district. That would assist in building a closer community. Sir, when the Constituency Councils are formed, all of those persons will come on-board to assist with the proper development of Barbados. Sir, you would not have to vote for anyone. They will be selected on their ability to assist, not on the amount of money they carry to the polls.

Sir, I must thank the people of St. Michael East for giving me this opportunity to champion their cause in this House of Assembly. As I traverse through St. Michael East, there are several people who need the assistance of the National Assistance Board and you can be assured that the Minister will not sleep easy, because as the Honourable Member for St. Lucy said, I will be annoying him continuously for assistance.

Sir, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas should be the last to talk about shame. I sat in this Honourable House and heard her lambasting the Honourable Member for St. George North, saying that for 10 years she begged for a road and did not get it, but after the Democratic Labour Party Administration came to office, within less than a year, she is complaining on national television about things to fix. The Honourable Member was responsible for the destruction of a road, which means the money that the Democratic Labour Party would have to fix another, has to be used to fix that road.

Sir, I want to support this Bill wholeheartedly.

I thank you.

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

3.00 p.m.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Speaker, I rise to wrap up this debate. I must confess that when I introduced the Bill, I hardly would have thought that we would have had such diverse and wide-ranging presentations. Indeed, one would hardly have expected the level of clarity of thought and clinicalness of the precision of presentations coming from Members of This Side.

I must say that those Honourable Members on the Other Side who spoke, contributed well to the debate as well, and I want to congratulate them for their contributions, particularly, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas, who highlighted some issues, which I really did not wish to get into too deeply, but I think some of them I really have to respond to, and some of my colleagues responded very well to some of them but, I think as Minister, I should say a few words.

This issue of the National Assistance Board as we said, quite correctly, is very important, because it is a service that we put a lot of energy and pride in, and we are often very dis-affected with anything that affects it in a way that is not positive. I could think of nothing more disheartening in the last few years, than the leadership of the last National Assistance Board.

I think that more than anything, we on All Sides - and I think if Honourable Members on that side are having one of their better days, they too will agree that the leadership of the last Board was something that we could have and should have been able to avoid.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: I am not talking about the staff. I am talking about the Board, particularly, the Chairman of the Board, a Chairman who brought the Board's level of director to dizzying lows, in terms of the levels of policy-making at the Board.

The Honourable Member for the City spoke, haltingly, about fiasco with what otherwise was a very good programme, the Hampers Programme, one that the staff took pride in doing. In fact, even now there are staff members who lament the fact that it was a programme they built up from scratch, that they had a positive relationship with many merchants in Barbados who, at a certain point in time in the year from around July, would call the Board. The staff did not have to call. The merchants would call the staff and say that we know that you are doing your Hampers Programme, what do you want? Sir, the fact that such a wonderful programme was put into abeyance, bastardise, and destroyed by pure political opportunism and nastiness, is disappointing.

Sir, some people say, stealing. Well, I would not call it stealing. I would perhaps call it larceny. In the dead of night, hampers were missing. These were hampers for the elderly, to the extent that it was messy that the then new Minister, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East, who is not with us today, had to close the programme.

The first thing that the then Director said to the Honourable Minister: "Minister, that thing has fallen to such nasty lows, that I want absolutely nothing to do with it. Shut it down. Bring it to an end. Sir, I will tell you this. We have revised and reviewed that programme, and the Democratic Labour Party will reintroduce that programme again, but under new Rules.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Sir, of course, we have a capable Chairperson, who has done a wonderful job since she has been there. One thing you cannot accuse her of is stealing or larceny, and she will continue to do a good job in that particular designation.

Mr. Speaker, it did not end there. The low quality of service that we had at the National Assistance Board during the last years, as I said in my opening presentation, was directly related to the last Chairman of National Assistance

Board. You know who he is. He hangs around in the office downstairs.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member now knows who it is so she agrees. The Honourable Member now realises whom I am talking about, who raked up people off the streets and carried them and many, many women in Barbados can tell you about the 5.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m. appointments for interviews and what room they had to go in. All that kind of nonsense took place in the name of the NAB.

I blame the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter, because the Right Honourable Member must have known that person was ill-qualified to hold that position. Sir, it was the contemptuous nature of how the last Government treated the National Assistance Board, that you can throw at them somebody who clearly was not suitable for that post, and should not have been leading Statutory Corporations or Statutory Boards in Barbados of this serious nature.

Therefore, when you hear stories about every Estimates meetings how the staff at the National Assistance Board was harassed and abused by the Minister of Finance. The staff reported that at one meeting every time they opened their mouths the Minister would cut \$10 000. He would say \$10 000 gone. What do you have to say, Mr. Director? \$10 000 more gone. What do you have to say? \$20 000. Anybody else has anything to say? This is how the National Assistance Board was conducted. It was so bad that one day the staff almost broke down in tears. This is why they are all missing today, because they do not want to hear it. We know what their record has been....

The Barbados Labour Party introduced the Home Help Service, under Don Blackman, whom they harangued and harassed out of the Barbados Labour Party. Then, they came back into office, less than 15 years later, and practically presided over its destruction.

It is unfortunate, but luckily the people of Barbados saw reason for change, elected the Democratic Labour Party and we are working to get it back to its high standards. I give Honourable Members in here the assurance that we will make the necessary changes at the National Assistance Board to ensure that we service our population in the way that we can.

Thank you, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this Sitting be suspended until 3.15 p.m. today.

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question that the Sitting be now suspended until 3.15 p.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER suspended the Sitting accordingly.

House A28, Sequence 28, 3.10 p.m.

Friday, February 13, 2009

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER: This Sitting is resumed. Yes, Honourable Member.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Speaker, when we took the break, I was winding up the point of the fact that we have to ensure, and to guarantee Honourable Members on Both Sides, that substantial changes would be made at the National Assistance Board not only in terms of the staffing complement, but in the design of the programme and the zoning.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, I think the Honourable Members for St. Michael East and St. Lucy made the point that there is not even distribution. Sir, many times, and in many ways, some of that relates to some skewing in the zoning of how they arrive at those persons who are to get home help and how it is divided up among groups.

We also have to look at the question of staffing. There is a situation in which, as I said, the numbers are growing and we really might need staff, but it is how you treat to the issues of persons who are currently there, some of whom are working on three days a week, about 30 or 40, as what is called "Relief Home Helpers."

Some of them need to get training, some of whom have shown aptitude to be moved to five days a week. Sir, of course, once you do that, you have to create a post because of the fact that the three days a week is temporary, so that if you move them to five working days, you have to create posts which, of course, include cost and in this very serious situation that we have in terms of the economy, we have to tread with caution in the way we create posts within the Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, we have to look at the entire programme to ensure this is what we want to do and how we are going to proceed with it. At present in the Ministry we are considering various proposals to deal with this matter, but I give Honourable Members the assurance that we will deal with it as expeditiously as possible.

Mr. Speaker, the other point I would want to make would be in relation to a comment made by several Members, the question of housing for the elderly. We know their living conditions, in many instances, are not the best. They are not ideal or good.

In fact, I lament the fact that in the last 14 years the last Government created two institutions, the Urban Development Commission and the Rural Development Commission, and the former National Assistance Board and welfare housing were distributed in urban areas between the two Commissions.

The problem was that sufficient information was not given to the Commissions and in many respects, both Commissions cannot tell you where all of these houses are or what conditions they are in.

Sir, my understanding is that a lot of these houses are in very bad condition. I know this from the fact that several of the occupants who happen now to be young people, because a lot of the original occupants have passed on, have come to us at the Urban Development Commission and the Rural Development Commission, to inform us that they are living in a house given by the National Assistance Board and that those houses are in very bad condition. Sir, when we go to see it, very few of them have water-borne toilet facilities, many of them are using out-houses.

Secondly, a lot of these houses have not been treated for subterranean termites and the termites are eating them out from top to bottom, so much so that the floorings are gone and the doors are dropping off.

Sir, you would be happy to note that the Minister of Finance has made provision in last year's Estimates and if all goes well, in next year's Estimates - and that is not to nudge the Minister of Finance in any way - that we have identified to establish what we call "Rapid Response Units" to deal with those house repairs, to ensure that we get those houses up, because it is an asset. They are part of the housing stock of both Commissions.

I also want to give this assurance that we are not going to be building houses as we were doing before and then not having them properly recorded. There was no proper life licence done to give the Urban Development Commission and the Rural Development Commission control over these properties and so, when the original occupants die...

When it was said I was searching for houses, people thought it was a joke. Up to two days ago, I saw three of these houses, two in the Constituency of the Honourable Member for St. Michael South. Sir, some of these houses have been moved from their original spots. A guy took us

to show us a house that belongs to the Urban Development Commission. When we got to the spot, there was no house there. The guy then took us to the next gap where the house was apparently been moved to a new spot of land.

Mr. Speaker, in Middleton, St. George, I saw a house that was freshly built. The guy for whom it was built apparently died two weeks before the house was finished and the house is now closed up. A lady told me she was getting ready to move into it, because it was closed up for over a year. There is a house in Eastlyn, St. George, one in Alkins, Eagle Hall. Sir, some of these houses are on land that belong to other people who want those houses off their land.

An attorney-at-Law wrote me about one. He said his client's brother gave permission for his brother to have the house built there. The Rural Development Commission then built the house, but the brother for whom it was built subsequently passed away. That brother's children then moved into the house, with which he has no problem, but that the children have now become so abusive that he cannot take it on anymore, and so he would like the Rural Development Commission to move the house off his land, so that he could sell it. Sir, we now have to deal with that situation.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a joke, and what we have done at the Urban Development Commission and will do at the Rural Development Commission, is that we will be investing in the GPS technology to map and to record where those houses are being built. Whenever these houses are built, there has to be a proper life licence and proper arrangements.

Sir, I have to say to the Honourable Member for St. Michael East that the Rules of the Commissions and Laws of Barbados dictate that it is unwise for us to go and build houses on people's properties, unless we have written permission to do so.

Sir, we will not be building houses on people's properties. We cannot do that. We ran into a lot of problems. I have on my desk a whole set where people are now saying they want these houses off their properties and we have no where to put them.

Mr. Speaker, we had a situation in the Urban Development Commission, in particular, where they have gone and cut roads across people's land. How can you cut a road right across somebody else's land without getting permission? Sir, this is ridiculous and so we have to clean up that entire mess.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: There is a particular Member of this Honourable House, who will go unnamed, whose family has land in Barbados, which will go unnamed for the time being, where between the Urban Development Commission, the National Housing Corporation and the Ministry of Housing and Lands, have control of that land, or is occupying that land, in a situation where the owner of that land has not been remunerated for it.

Sir, you cannot do that to people, it is not fair. That is not the only one. There are several other spots, and it is not in the instances where people do not want to assist the Government. People want to assist both Administrations in their programmes, but we have to do these things the right way.

Therefore, when the Honourable Member for St. Michael East speaks about the house belonging to the National Assistance Board that was repaired by the Rural Development Commission, that is now being used as a house for fish-fry on weekends, or when, as will happen in this Honourable House, I have to speak about a former Honourable Member, whose very close relation was renting a house belonging to somebody the Urban Development Commission gave to somebody else...

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, we treat the people who are most deserving, that is the poor, the indigent, persons with disabilities and the elderly. Those are persons who, in the end, suffer.

3.30 p.m.

Sir, the politicians would go home and do what they have to do, because they have their own homes. The civil servants will go home, those who have their own homes and who have done well, but it is the ordinary man and woman in Barbados, who cannot do better, who will suffer. If we do not put proper systems in place to ensure that what little the State could give, is given efficiently and expeditiously, but with the necessary protection and caution, to ensure that the efforts of the State are not taken for granted or abused by persons, who do not mean well. Sir, that is what has to happen in Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members on That Side spoke about what we did or did not do last year at the Urban Development Commission but my view is, that you cannot lie down in mess and that you have to clean it up. Sir, we had to clean it up and I am happy to note that the work programme has re-started and that contracts have been issued.

Mr. Speaker, the case that you saw on the front page of the "Nation" News did not begin with the Democratic

Labour Party. The first time I saw it was in the Nation News, but I sent for the file because I happened to be at the Urban Development Commission on that day, because that was the day the Minister meets people.

Sir, I sent for the file and when I read it, the house was profiled, the technical drawings were done, approval was given from Town Planning and a contract awarded to a contractor, who never turned up for the job.

Sir, it was over three years. Nobody followed-up the contractor, nobody looked at the cheque that was written for the contractor. The cheque was still there and nobody looked back or went back to it. Sir, it was that type of callous disregard. Sir, it just takes a reporter from the media, who wants to brag to their friends that they have been able to put something on the front page to go and take a picture and put it on the front page and, Sir, there you have it, the story of the year.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that we can stop that. We have put in place a system in the new Rapid Response Unit at the Urban Development Commission that we have given time lines. There are time lines between when a person walks through the door, when their case is profiled by the investigators and when work starts and finishes. Sir, they have to meet those deadlines.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes you get problems in works. You have to make adjustments and that causes delays, but there is no able excuse for having a person wait five years, six years or seven years. I had a case in my Constituency. It was visited by no fewer than three Ministers of Social Care or Social Transformation of the Barbados Labour Party.

In fact, it is in that very district that the former Prime Minister and the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter discovered poverty in Barbados for the first time. It was that which inspired the establishment of the Urban Development Commission, when he said in that By-Election that he had never seen poverty like that in his life in Barbados, and did not know it existed.

Sir, you know that the very house that moved him to say he did not know that type of poverty existed, stands today, not finished, not touched by the last Administration after 11 years?

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that it is coming down shortly. The landmarks are being established and that relief will be brought to that family. Sir, you know when the technical officers from the Commission went there two weeks ago and went at the property, the guy swallowed back tears?

He asked the Minister if it was there all the time and said it never came to his desk. I said I was not sure it came

to his desk before, but that I was now putting it on his desk, and that he must look after it. He said the property must be pushed down and that a new property will be in its place by Easter, but that no Barbadians should have to live in that condition.

Mr. Speaker, that is only one. Sir, I am sure that all Honourable Members in here on Both Sides could point to similar cases like that in their own constituencies.

Sir, St. Michael South has about five houses or six houses that we know of that we have to tackle immediately. I have told them that I have a list of St. Michael South and that we have to go there. I do not know why St. Michael South, in particular, but the Honourable Member for St. Michael South could tell you that things there are bad. I went to one house in which you could stay from one side of the road and see the Other Side. Sir, it is not good, it is bad.

Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that these cases are dealt with delicately and with a matter of urgency. Sir, I believe that is the reason why the Chief Town Planner was put on the Board of the Urban Development Commission, not only to advise on urban renewal, but also to ensure that there is some kind of speed in getting these properties profiled and getting building provision passed, because these are small properties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are a lot of things we would have to do. I should make one correction that the Honourable Member for St. Lucy has pointed out to me. Earlier, I said the Director, but I actually meant the Chairman. Sir, let me say the former Chairman, not Director, because the Director is the person who actually runs the place. I mean the former Chairman and to apologise to the Director, if I caused him any discomfort in that particular regard.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Yes, he is a good chap. I want to say that we have already begun to advertise for a new and permanent Director of the National Assistance Board. We will be issuing notices for application for both Chief Welfare Officer and Deputy Chief Welfare Officer.

We not only have to clean up the National Assistance Board, but we also have to do some work at the Welfare Department as well. We have to be more aggressive in our approach in terms of treating welfare cases. I have told the staff, when I visited there on my site visit, that you cannot sit down as a social worker or a welfare officer and wait for poverty to turn up at the door like Red Plastic Bag in his famous calypso of two years ago and say "Look meh here".

You have to get out, go find it and we have to correct a situation in which we have a Welfare Department that was actually returning millions of dollars to the Minister of Finance at the end of the financial year, every year, in un-spent money. I will speak to this when the Estimates comes, because something has to be fundamentally wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I have enquired into it. I think I know what the problem is and we have moved to correct that problem. Sir, there are people out there, who need support.

If you have a computer programme that is cutting people off every 10 weeks, you need to follow-up to make sure that those persons actually still need to get service. Sir, you cannot treat persons like a statistic or like a bill you pay at the telephone company and when you do not pay the bill at the end of the month or whenever the case may be, it is cut off and you do not hear anything about it.

Mr. Speaker, we have ensured that we will go back, find those persons and make sure that those persons are off the welfare system, or if they need to continue support. Sir, these are the things that the Democratic Labour Party Government is doing in the interest of Barbadians. We want to say that we will continue this vigorous work.

Sir, the Prime Minister made the point, when he did his last Cabinet reshuffle, that social care and social development is an important part of this Government's mandate and mission.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has given me the privilege of leading this particular sector. I want to be able to do so with every sinew in my body so long as God gives me the strength, my constituents give me the support and the rest of Barbados gives me the encouragement for us to make real and substantial changes in the way in which, we not only conceptualise and develop, but in the way we implement and, important as well, the way we monitor and evaluate the delivery of social services in this country.

Mr. Speaker, with those words, I beg to move that this Bill be read a second time.

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

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

3.40 p.m.

On the separate motions of Hon. C. P. SINCKLER, seconded by Hon. P. M. T. TODD, the House resolved itself into Committee, Mr. S. A. LASHLEY in the Chair.

COMMITTEE

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This House is in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 3 were called and passed.

The Schedule to the Bill with amendment Paragraph VII should read:

“The Chairman shall cause to be published in the Official Gazette the appointment, removal and resignation, as opposed to registration.”

The Schedule, as amended, became the Schedule to the Bill.

On the motion of Hon. C. P. SINCKLER, seconded by the Honourable P. M. T. TODD, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported to His Honour the SPEAKER, the passing of one Bill in Committee, with amendment, and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

On the separate motions of Hon. C. P. SINCKLER, seconded by Hon. P. M. T. TODD, the Bill was read a third time, passed and cited as the National Assistance (Amendment) Act, 2009.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ORDER NO. 12

RESOLUTION TO GRANT \$8 754 289 FROM THE CONSOLIDATED FUND AND TO PLACE IT AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE GOVERNMENT TO SUPPLEMENT THE ESTIMATES OF THE 2008-2009 AS SHOWN IN THE SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES NO. 17 WHICH FORM THE SCHEDULE TO THIS RESOLUTION.

HEAD 13

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE \$1 575 531

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Member for St. John.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, this sum relates to an additional amount in the sum of \$84 324 to cover the cost of Government advertising, \$69 000 for the cost of electricity in the Immigration Department, and \$9 864 to cover the cost of petroleum products, and in relation to broadcasting the sum of \$1.4 million.

Sir, I thought I would take this opportunity to point out that in due course, we will be having the Estimates debate, but a lot of excitement has been generated in the past few days over Barbados' State-owned broadcasting

station, which falls under my responsibility as Minister of Information.

Sir, the same policies that have been in place for the past 14 years at the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation are still in place.

The policy and Law relating to political broadcast is still in place.

I am not going to advise the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation to break the Law, as may be the case with other radio stations in Barbados, and to carry political broadcasts in contravention of the electoral Laws in our country.

Therefore, when you have two major broadcasting entities, one Government-owned the other is a competitor, it is not surprising to see certain editorials in the newspaper. It is not surprising to hear certain comments being made in relation to an active competitor. It is unfortunate though.

I well remember, in 1986, when the Barbados Labour Party lost the Government the Nation Newspaper on its front page took the position that since the Opposition has been decimated, they will become the official Opposition in Barbados. A lot of people may not remember this. That was a front page story in 1986.

Sir, for 14 years I have not seen a single editorial in the Nation Newspaper, even when there were only two seats on the Other Side in a Parliament of 30, ever saying that was its role. I am not knocking the Nation. The Nation is owned by shareholders, not by the Government, and a private newspaper is entitled to do its shareholders' bidding and is entitled to carry out the acts of its Directors.

Sir, I run a political Party that is also likewise entitled to take its position about those entities with which it does business and which it gives its symbol and name to the position that they take.

Sir, as I said, I read the newspaper, which did not seek to get to the facts, but took positions cognizant with those given by the Honourable Member for St. Michael North East, who is inclined to give the impression to Barbadians that she held a Press Conference and the Caribbean

3.50 p.m.

Broadcasting Corporation carried nothing from the Press Conference. I understand that is not the real beef. They did not carry what she wanted carried and that is the problem. There are certain statements she made that she wanted the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation to carry.

I have here, Mr. Chairman, the three news items that were carried. They said nothing was carried in relation to a matter with C.L. Financial. I see a news item here saying, “and the Leader of the Opposition has been reacting to the CLICO developments, is calling on Government to calm any fears or uncertainties among the local population, thousands of Barbadians stand to lose their livelihood, which is banked on funds that are invested.” This story was carried on the television news.

After the Press Conference, three stories were carried. One story emanating from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who said that the Barbados Labour Party will not be supporting the Constituency Councils Bill. Another story opposing Government’s decision to increase petroleum prices from February 1. It said she made the comments at a news conference at her office in Parliament buildings, and the third story calling for the implementation of a Financial Services Authority speaking from her Parliamentary office to talk about the CL Financial Affair that is happening in Trinidad and Tobago and any possible impact it may have on its subsidiaries. This was carried on the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation’s station.

The Law in relation to broadcasting, the regulations, the licence that Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation operates under is very clear. It is the same licence that other stations operate under. Under Section 5, it indicates what kinds of broadcasts can be prohibited. Therefore, if any news that the licensee or any servant or agent of the licensee who is concerned in the collection, editing, publication or printing of such news, knows or believes to be false and misleading, then they shall not permit it to be broadcast. This is an editorial judgment.

I have not given any instructions, directives or anything else to the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation, as Minister of Information. Sir, I spent a long time in Opposition. I remember in 1998, we were trying to get our views across and we got no co-operation.

Again, between 1999 and 2003, we got no co-operation. Sir, between 2003 and 2008, we had to fight both the, almost, blackout of news, as well as an attempt to black us out in this Parliament, until we had to prorogue this Parliament and tell the people it is time for Elections in Barbados.

Asides.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Sir, for 14 years, CBC did not carry Constituency meetings. I have heard the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter complaining that he wants his meetings carried. He is a former Minister of Information who put that policy in place, that they should not carry Constituency meetings. They carry zone meetings, they carry other national meetings, but they do

not carry Constituency meetings. This is nothing new. It is the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter who put that policy in place and now you hear his acolytes and those whom he wants to topple from their leadership positions, joining him giving the impression that there is something for people to demonstrate for.

Sir, if people want to demonstrate for democracy, they should have demonstrated when a respected pollster by the name of Peter Wickham was removed from The People’s Business on the instructions of a Minister in the Barbados Labour Party Government. People may not remember that, Sir.

The people in the newsroom at CBC, prior to 2008 were trying to get me to go on the People’s Business and instructions were given from higher up that I was not to be on the People’s Business. I did not have any interest in being on it. They wanted it. They told me they wanted it.

House A28, Sequence 34, 3.55 p.m.

Friday, February 13, 2009

On the motion of Hon. F. J. STUART, seconded by Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported to His Honour, the SPEAKER the passing of one Money Resolution in Committee of Supply and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

On the separate motions of Hon. F. J. STUART, seconded by Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE, the Resolution was read a first and second time and passed.

ORDER NO. 7 – SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL, 2009

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, this Supplementary Appropriation Bill has been brought in this format because when last we did a major supplementary, the Opposition said that they wanted to have a full economic debate, which would give Members of both the House and the Senate an opportunity to debate the economy, if they so wish.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to give an outline of the fiscal performance from April 01, to December 31, 2008, which is the information that was requested previously. The information that we have from the Accountant-General indicates that current revenue for the period April 01, to December 31, 2008 was \$1 729.5 million, a decrease of \$0.4 million or 0.4 per cent over the amount recorded for the corresponding period 2007-2008. This can be compared with an original projection of \$1 882.0 million.

Taxes on income and profits realised \$487.1 million, which is 15.7 per cent less than collected for 2007-2008.

This was mainly the result of a decrease in Corporation Tax over the corresponding period.

Taxes on property increased by \$17.6 million to \$111.2 million as a result of an increase in Land Tax by \$23.3 million.

Taxes on goods and services increased by \$31.7 million, or 4 per cent to \$808.3 million. Receipts of VAT totalled \$609.4 million, an increase of \$27 million, whereas Excise Duties recorded \$122 million, a decrease of \$1.2 million. Our import duties increase by \$4 million, or 2.4 per cent, to \$172.9 million. Special receipts increased by \$24.9 million to \$63.3 million, whereas our non-tax revenue decreased by \$5.9 million over the corresponding period.

Current expenditure, exclusive of amortisation which is \$348.8 million, increased by \$45.9 million or 2.6 per cent over the 2007-2008 figure to \$1 793.6 million. This can be compared to an original projection of \$2 116 million.

Wages and salaries decreased by \$49.2 million. This was due mainly to the payment of arrears of salaries and wages at the beginning of 2007-2008.

Expenditure on goods and services increased by \$18.2 million and current transfers increased by \$98.2 million, or 16 per cent over last year's figures.

Capital expenditure decreased by \$2.5 million to \$116.4 million over the corresponding period last year. This could be compared to an original projection of \$157.6 million.

The current balance for the period ending December 2008 was negative. \$408.9 million and the deficit of \$180.5 million represents 2.4 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product at market prices of \$7 512.9 million.

Mr. Speaker, this is the information that was requested. I do not see the Honourable Member for St. Michael North East in her seat, or the Honourable Member for St. Peter, or for that matter many of the Honourable Members of the Opposition, but I was ready for an economic debate if they wished.

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

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

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

On the motion of Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON, seconded by Hon. F. J. STUART, the House resolved itself into Committee, Mr. S. A. LASHLEY in the Chair.

COMMITTEE

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This House is in Committee.

HEAD 13 - PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

\$565 153

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: I beg to move that Head 13 stand part.

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

The question that Head 13 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

HEAD 19

TREASURY \$62 048

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Sir, I beg to move that Head 19 stand part.

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

The question that Head 19 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

HEAD 52

MINISTRY OF FINANCE, ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND ENERGY \$250 725

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that Head 52 stand part.

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

The question that Head 52 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

HEAD 56

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE \$1 889 330

Hon. S. D. BLACKETT: I beg to move that Head 56 stand part.

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

The question that Head 56 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

4.10 p.m.

Tuesday, February 13, 2009

Clauses 1 - 3, inclusive, were called and passed.

Clause 4, with amendment, was called and passed.

The Schedule was called and passed.

On the motion of Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON, seconded by Hon. F. J. STUART, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported to His Honour the SPEAKER, the passing of one Bill in Committee and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

On the separate motions of Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON, seconded by Hon. F. J. STUART, the Bill was read a third time, passed and cited as the Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2008.

ADJOURNMENT OF HOUSE

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, that concludes Government Business for the day. Therefore, I beg to move that this Honourable House be now adjourned until Tuesday, February 17, 2009, at 10.00 a.m.

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

The question that the House be now adjourned until Tuesday, February 17, 2009, at 10.00 a.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative, without division and Mr. SPEAKER adjourned the House accordingly.

4.15 p.m.

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SPEAKERS IN THIS ISSUE

BEST, His Honour K. St.C. (St. Michael East)**BLACKETT, Hon. S. D. (St. Michael Central)****BOYCE, Hon. J. D. E. (Christ Church South)****BYER-SUCKOO, Hon. Dr. E. R. (St. George South)****EASTMOND, Mr. R. C. (St. James North)****FORDE, Miss C. Y. (St. Thomas)****HUTSON, Hon. E. G. (St. James Central)****JONES, Hon. R. D. (Christ Church East Central)****KELLMAN, His Excellency D. St.E. (St. Lucy)****LASHLEY, Mr. H. F. (St. Michael South East)****LASHLEY, Mr. S. A. (Christ Church West Central)****SINCKLER, Hon. C. P. (St. Michael North West)****STUART, Hon. F. J. (St. Michael South)****THOMPSON, Hon. D. J. H. (St. John)****TODD, Hon. P. M. T. (City of Bridgetown)**

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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. Order No. 4, title of the Bill. The Order Paper heading and the Act as cited read ‘NATIONAL ASSISTANCE (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2009’, while Mr. Speaker on resumption calls it the ‘National Assistance Board (Amendment) Bill, 2009’ and the Minister refers to the ‘National Assistance Board Act’. Printed as in the source.

Q2. Take-slips. The first take-slip reads ‘9.50 a.m.’, although the House met at 10.15 a.m.; two consecutive take-slips read ‘2.20 p.m.’; and a slip after Head 56 reads ‘Tuesday, February 13, 2009’, although the sitting was on Friday, 13th February, 2009. Printed as in the source.

Q3. Order No. 4, Committee. The source spells the seconder ‘Hon. P. M. T. TODD’ in the motion to go into Committee and ‘TODD’ elsewhere. Printed as in the source.

Q4. Order No. 12, Resolution. The title of the Resolution reads ‘THE ESTIMATES OF THE 2008-2009’, presumably 2008-2009. Printed as in the source.

Q5. Order No. 7, third reading. The Supplementary Appropriation Bill, 2009 is cited on third reading as the ‘Supplementary Appropriation Act, 2008’. Printed as in the source.

Q6. Order No. 7, second reading. The Prime Minister gives the deficit of \$180.5 million as ‘\$2.4 per cent’ of Gross Domestic Product; presumably 2.4 per cent. Printed as in the source.

Q7. Speech headings. Mr. D. St.E. Kellman is headed ‘His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN’ in all his speeches and points of order, and one speech of Mr. S. A. Lashley is headed ‘Mr. S. LASHLEY’. Printed as in the source.

DEBATE SUMMARY

(Editorial summary — not part of the record.)

The House of Assembly met on Friday, 13th February, 2009 at 10.15 a.m., with Mr. Speaker, His Honour M. A. Carrington, in the Chair. No Minutes were available, and on the motion of Hon. R. D. Jones the

Minutes of the last Sitting were deferred. Standing Orders were suspended for the rest of the Sitting.

Under Order No. 4, Hon. C. P. Sinckler moved the second reading of the National Assistance (Amendment) Bill, 2009, which enlarges the National Assistance Board from seven to nine members; he said that the previous Administration had proposed an increase of one, which would have left an even number. He spoke of the Home Help Service begun in the early 1980s, of elderly persons without pensions, and of temporary relief workers taken on in 2007 without training in Care of the Elderly, and he announced a restructuring of the service, legislation on the abuse of the elderly and additional spaces in senior citizens’ homes. Miss C. Y. Forde, Member for St. Thomas, supported the Bill, called for training of staff and subventions for NGOs, and described a proposed project for the elderly in St. Thomas that had not gone ahead.

Mr. H. F. Lashley, Member for St. Michael South East, supported the Bill and proposed a memory bank programme with the University of the West Indies and a national drama programme for seniors. Mr. S. A. Lashley, Member for Christ Church West Central, said that persons had been hand-picked for assistance on the basis of party membership and quoted an undated Ministry of Social Transformation document, which Mr. Speaker asked him to cite properly; Miss Forde rose on a point of order to say that she had made no recommendations. Hon. Dr. E. R. Byer-Suckoo, Member for St. George South, spoke of ‘Project Give Back’ and of Alzheimer’s disease and depression among the elderly; on a point of order from Miss Forde, Mr. Speaker asked her to withdraw a remark and she did so. Mr. R. C. Eastmond, Member for St. James North, raised pension arrangements, abuse in private day care centres and the treatment of people living alone, after a point of order from Mr. D. St.E. Kellman.

After a suspension until 1.45 p.m., Hon. P. M. T. Todd criticised the previous Government’s record on social services and congratulated the Board’s Deputy Director, Miss Diane Sobers. Mr. Kellman, Member for St. Lucy, supported the increase in the Board but called for better treatment of the elderly and for buses accessible to all; Mr. Eastmond intervened on a point of order over a quotation attributed to Mr. Don Blackman. His Honour K. St.C. Best, Member for St. Michael East, called for specialised training of workers and criticised a Meals-on-Wheels programme receiving a subvention, and withdrew remarks when stopped by Mr. Speaker. Mr. Sinckler replied, criticising the former Chairman of the Board over missing hampers, describing a Rapid Response Unit at the Urban Development Commission and stating that a permanent Director would be advertised. The Bill was read a second

time; in Committee, with Mr. S. A. Lashley in the Chair, clauses 1 to 3 and the Schedule as amended were passed, and the Bill was read a third time and passed.

In Committee of Supply on Order No. 12, a Resolution to grant \$8 754 289 under Supplementary Estimates No. 17, the Prime Minister, Hon. D. J. H. Thompson, explained the sums under Head 13, including \$1.4 million for broadcasting, and used the occasion to deny that he had directed the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation over its coverage of an Opposition press conference, reading the three news items it had carried. The Resolution was passed.

On Order No. 7, the Supplementary Appropriation Bill, 2009, the Prime Minister gave the fiscal outturn for April to December 2008: current revenue of \$1 729.5 million against a projection of \$1 882.0 million, current expenditure of \$1 793.6 million, capital expenditure of \$116.4 million and a deficit of \$180.5 million on a GDP of \$7 512.9 million. Heads 13, 19, 52 and 56 stood part, clause 4 was amended, and the Bill passed. On the motion of Hon. R. D. Jones, the House was adjourned until Tuesday, 17th February, 2009 at 10.00 a.m.