
THE

House of Assembly Debates

(UNOFFICIAL REPORT)

SECOND SESSION 2008 – 2013

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, February 17, 2009

Pursuant to the adjournment, the House of Assembly met at 10.15 a.m. on Tuesday, February 17, 2009.

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)

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

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND, J.P., B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed., LL.M. (Hons.) (Lond.), LL.M (Leic.)

Mr. G. A. CLARKE, J.P., B.Sc., Dip. Ed.

Mr. H. F. LASHLEY

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

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN

Miss C. Y. FORDE, J.P., L.C.P.

Hon. R. D. JONES, J.P., M.A. (Ed.), B.A. (Hons.) (Minister of Education and Human Resource Development), (Leader of the House)

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

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

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

Hon. E. G. HUTSON, F.C.C.A., C.A. (Minister of Trade, Industry and Commerce)

Hon. S. D. BLACKETT (Minister of Community Development and Culture)

Mr. J. D. PAUL, B.Sc.

Mr. A. D. BRATHWAITE, LL.B. (Hons.)

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY, B.Sc., LL.B. (Hons.), L.E.C., (Chairman of Committees)

Hon. P. M. T. TODD, B.Sc., (Minister of State, Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment, and Urban Development)

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER, M.Sc., B.A. (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and International Business)

Prayers were led by Rev. Cannon Ivan Harewood.

Mr. SPEAKER: This House is now in session.

MINUTES

Mr. SPEAKER: Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, February 10, 2009.

Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes so cited be confirmed, subject to any omissions, observations and/or corrections.

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

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

I am not in receipt of the Minutes for February 13, 2009, therefore, I would ask that we have the formal motion that those Minutes be deferred until our next Sitting.

Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes for February 13, 2009 be deferred until our next Sitting.

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

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

PAPERS

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

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to lay the following:

1. Duties, Taxes and Other Payments (Exemption) Mount Gay Distilleries Limited (Order) 2009.
2. The Half Yearly Reports from the Revenue Earning Departments under the Ministry of Finance for the period October 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008.

Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to lay the following:

Annual Report of the Transport Board 2006/2007.

FIRST READING OF BILLS

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the First Reading of the following Bill:

Income Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2009.

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

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

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Hon. M. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to move the First Reading of the following Bill:

The Bay Street (Vesting) Bill, 2009.

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

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 3 – VALUE ADDED TAX (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2009 (RESUMED)

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

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Bill to amend the Value Added Tax Act. Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the listening public and those of us who have forgotten the details of the amendment, permit me to briefly recap the proposed amendments to this Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Act provides for a refund to qualified homeowners of the building material used in the construction of their dwelling-house. Mr. Speaker, that refund is equivalent to 7 per cent of the value of the house; therefore, if your house is valued at \$100 000, the maximum claim would be 7 per cent of that, some \$7 000, and if the house is valued at the maximum, \$150 000, that 7 per cent amounts to some \$10 500.

The rest of the amendment, Mr. Speaker, identifies that particular vulnerable group, first-time homeowners, who would be able to benefit from these provisions. The homeowners must also live in the house. The house could be a newly constructed house, for example, one of the National Housing Corporation houses, or a house built by the homeowners themselves. Mr. Speaker, annual gross family income should not exceed \$42 000. Gross family income is defined within the Act as combined gross income of adult persons living in that house.

In addition, homeowners have up to two years after completing construction of the house to make that claim with the Comptroller of Customs for the refund. That claim must be accompanied by a sworn affidavit confirming that they are first-time homeowners, a Certificate of Completion from the Chief Town Planner and a valuation certificate.

That certificate can either be from their own recognised valuer - there may be some fee attached to the homeowner if they go in that particular route - or they could simply use the improved value of their property as stated on their annual land tax bill. Mr. Speaker, those are the proposed amendments to this Value Added Tax Bill that we started to debate two weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker, during that time, I reflected on these amendments and I asked myself how are these amendments

going to benefit those persons who live in Prospect, Fitts Village, Paynes Bay and Redman Village in the Constituency of St. James Central? Mr. Speaker, how would this amendment affect the many single parents that come into my constituency office on Wednesdays and Fridays seeking to purchase either a house spot or a property?

Mr. Speaker, I also reflected on those youngsters who have recently been married and getting ready to embark on a new life and to start their own families. Mr. Speaker, as I reflected on these issues, my own personal experience came to mind. Mr. Speaker, decisions that we make in our senior life are always predicated on our life experiences.

Mr. Speaker, I recall the challenges faced by my mother back in the late 1960s and the early 1970s as a single parent raising two sons on her own. My mother, as most persons would know, was divorced when I was a very small lad. I remember as a teenager the challenges that she had to raise that 10 per cent deposit that was required at that time if you wanted to purchase a property in Barbados and, at the same time, having to pay rent, and the little car loan that she had in the late 1960s. Mr. Speaker, every time you get close to the 10 per cent deposit, the value of the property inches a little bit. We had that challenge.

Mr. Speaker, as a young person, some 32 years ago, getting married, I remember the challenges myself and my lovely wife had to raise that 10 per cent deposit to purchase our own home and the challenges we had to keep pace with.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I cite that because it is important for us to reflect that circumstances have changed over the years, so that one can now get 100 per cent mortgage. Sir, the point is that despite that particular situation, there is still the challenge to those persons who are seeking to get property for themselves, those first-time homeowners as we refer to them in this Act. This amendment will enable those persons to be able to own their own homes.

Mr. Speaker, I know there is the view that these provisions should be front-end but, Sir, skillfully done, these rebates will still be able to be claimed. Sir, I want to say that in the way financing is done these days, one will know that the value of the insurance on the property and the Land Tax could be built into that mortgage up front, to ease the first year's payment, so that you do not have to be looking for mortgage money and then have to look for insurance money also.

Mr. Speaker, for a first-time homeowner, we can factor that rebate of the \$10 000 into the mortgage

payment, so that the rebate goes directly to the mortgagor. That will enable first-time homeowners to benefit significantly from this particular provision.

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to the Throne Speech, I believe already a document of this Honourable Chamber. I want to go to the section:

IMPROVING ACCESS TO PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Sir, I quote:

"Access to decent, affordable housing and land - "owning a piece of the rock" - remains one of the major concerns of Barbadians from all strata of society, especially those now starting out on life's journey. Decent housing is the key to good family life, educational success and productivity at work."

Mr. Speaker, those first-time homeowners to whom I referred moments ago, that young couple, and with the work being done by the Minister of Housing and Lands, in a number of months I can see the front page where the Minister is handing over the keys to one of those houses, to one of our young couples now branching out on life's journey. That is the policy and the effect of this amendment to this Act.

I can see the keys to one of the houses at Marchfield, St. Philip; Content, St. George and Four Hill, St. Peter. Sir, young couples across Barbados who are starting out on this life's journey will be able to benefit from the effects of this particular amendment.

It will also be done in St. James Central, once the few hitches in respect of land are cleared up. I expect shortly that at the time those houses are constructed to be part of putting the keys into the hands of one of these young couples.

Mr. Speaker, I go on:

"My Government is philosophically committed to ensuring that every Barbadian resident has access to comfortable shelter. It will therefore, over time..."

Mr. Speaker, I want to stress "over time". It continues:

"We will remove VAT on building materials valued up to \$400 000..."

Mr. Speaker, over time we will do this and this amendment speaks directly to this particular commitment. We are starting at houses valued at \$150 000. This Government does not take our promises lightly. This is a commitment we made to the people of Barbados, to our

first-time homeowners, and we have started the process by putting that promise in place. This is no “ragga ragga” Government. This is no bunch of wild boys.

I do not know about the Opposition. They may be a “ragga ragga” Party, but this is no “ragga ragga” Government, and I want to make that point quite clearly. Sir, there was a lot of rhetoric and no substance coming from the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, these are the issues and benefits we will see in this particular amendment.

Asides.

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: Mr. Speaker, I want to add that when our Manifesto was conceived and written in 2007, we took office and became the Government of this country in January 2008. Sir, when we took office, there was no way that any person could have foreseen the increases in prices that occurred in the early part of 2008. Nobody could have foreseen the price of oil and fuel going up. Sir, by midsummer of 2008, oil prices were as high as US\$150 per barrel. One could not have foreseen the massive increases in prices of commodities, such as wheat, rice and other grains. One could not have foreseen the food crisis that developed in the mid-1980s.

One could not have foreseen the financial crisis that enveloped the banking system in September and October, 2008. These were situations unforeseen and unprecedented, certainly in my lifetime. No one could have foreseen those challenges and today no one knows how deep that financial crisis would go, Sir, not even the guru from St. Peter.

Mr. Speaker, these are the challenges we face today. Sir, only last weekend we were subjected to a lot of rhetoric in the area of the National Stadium, where there was a lot of rhetoric and criticism of this Government.

10.40 a.m.

Sir, we and the people of Barbados were subjected to a lot of rhetoric, a lot of name calling and there has been a lot of cursing. This is all that has been offered by the members of the Barbados Labour Party over the last 10 years. Sir, there was disrespect and the people in St. James Central had cause to reject the rhetoric from the previous representative for St. James Central.

Sir, he could not put two sentences together unless he cursed someone. He has to attack, at a personal level and, Sir, any time that he addresses any public forum, he must attack and try to destroy the character of someone. Sir, the people of St. James Central have rejected that practice.

Mr. Speaker, even today and the past week, after rejection a year ago, he is now canvassing in Christ Church West, looking for a seat back in Christ Church West because he is of the opinion, Mr. Speaker, that the sitting Member for that constituency will not come again, so he is laying the ground work. Sir, there is no commitment, but yet he criticises me.

Mr. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, no one today knows how deep this crisis is going to go. Sir, the Americans are printing money like crazy because they do not know where this particular crisis is going. Sir, little Barbados is like a ship seeking safe harbour from this financial crisis, ably captained by the Honourable Prime Minister, David Thompson, the Honourable Member for St. John.

Sir, we have developed, on This Side, a series of measures to deal with the crisis. Sir, our whole approach to this is ensuring that we, in this crisis situation, can protect the vulnerable groups within the society. Sir, these are policies that put people first, ensuring that in this crisis, the ordinary man on the street would be able to come out of it.

Mr. Speaker, we have reduced the rents that people in the housing areas across Barbados will pay to the National Housing Corporation by giving those people who have occupied their premises in excess of 20 years, those premises for no additional costs except for minor legal charges. Sir, those people do not have to pay rent going forward.

Mr. Speaker, we have increased the reversed tax credit. Again, this is a measure for people at the bottom end of the economic scale and, Sir, not to talk about the free school rides for children. We have also increased the pension to elderly persons in our society. We have reduced the 2.5 per cent levy on a selection of items since August 2008. Sir, all these are measures to address working-class Barbadians.

Mr. Speaker, the personal tax allowance has been increased. We have asked the business community to work with the Social Partnership to ensure that we do not have major layoffs and to ensure that workers continue in their jobs. Sir, these are some of the measures we have put in place to address the crisis we have upon us.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments to the VAT Act have to be seen within the whole framework of those and other policies that have been articulated here in this House over the past 12 months. Sir, some measures within this set of amendments, have been implemented to ensure credibility and to avoid abuse of the system.

Mr. Speaker, I am thinking here of the fact that one needs a sworn Affidavit to establish that you are a first-time homeowner. We do not want landlords to build a second and a third house, like some on the Other Side, who are building apartments. We do not want them to benefit from this provision. Sir, this is why they are upset. Sir, they are upset because they cannot benefit from these provisions.

Mr. Speaker, a Land Tax Valuation and a Certificate of Completion are required and you have more than two years to claim this provision. Sir, these are some of the measures we have put in place in this amendment to ensure credibility to the whole system. This is not like anything that the Barbados Labour Party has implemented. Sir, those on the Other Side are aware of this. There has been a series of scandals like GEMS with more than \$240 million of taxpayers' money wasted through lack of control, lack of transparency and lack of accountability...

DR. W. F. DUGUID: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I hate to stop the Honourable Member in full flight, but he mentioned the matter of GEMS and suggested that money was wasted. Sir, the Honourable Member is aware that all the money spent in GEMS is now seen in what we got for the money. The Hilton Hotel alone, under this new Administration, has been valued at more than the \$200 million that was suggested. There is no way the Honourable Member could suggest that the money has been wasted when we have something to show for the money.

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: Mr. Speaker, the Barbados Hilton is not part of the GEMS, as far as I am aware. I do not understand what the Honourable Member is talking about. I am talking about the GEMS Project; the Savannah Hotel, Blue Horizon Hotel, the Escape Hotel and Eastray House. Sir, if you take the additional valuation you have had, you are still losing money because it is \$240 million.

10.50 a.m.

Sir, the Honourable Member for Christ Church West does not understand the magnitude of \$240 million. It is chicken feed to him.

Asides.

Dr. W. F. DUGUID: On a point of order. Sir, the point is, the Honourable Member said it was \$240 million wasted. I am trying to say that the value of the properties is greater than the cost; therefore, the money could not have been wasted.

Mr. SPEAKER: I find no point of order. Please continue Honourable Member. Honourable Member, your time is quickly expiring, so please continue.

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the whole question of credibility, the Hardwood Project, the ABC Highway, the flyovers, St. Leonard's School, and I can go on all morning with a list of instances where there were no credibility and accountability for the funds of the taxpayers. No doubt the general population agreed and would agree with me in this position. That is why the Honourable Member is on That Side this morning. Sir, the biggest example of poor governance in the history of this country is that of the last Administration, the manner in which they have accounted for the funds of taxpayers in this country.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that I support the amendment. I want to encourage Barbadians to embrace the amendments, particularly those first-time homeowners and single mothers, who are challenged to pay their rent and so on. We want to ensure that you are now paying a mortgage instead of paying rent and getting landlords like those on the Other Side, fat.

Sir, I thank you.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Sir, I rise to support this Bill before this Honourable Chamber and to join with the Honourable Member for St. James Central in applauding the Government for seeking to address the pressing housing needs of the vulnerable groups in our society, such as, the working-class and blue collar workers. Those workers have been neglected for a long time by the Barbados Labour Party Administration in their 14 years of office and are very relieved that a caring Democratic Labour Party Administration now controls the mantle of Government so that we can be taken forward along with the upper- and middle-classes in the development of our country.

Sir, Honourable Members on the Other Side had some issues with this amendment. They spoke about the problems of using an affidavit. I agree totally with the Honourable Member for St. James Central that we must be a responsible government, so the concept of signing an affidavit is not new to the current way of doing business at the National Housing Corporation. This has been in existence for decades.

Mr. Speaker, if someone had to purchase land or a house from the National Housing Corporation, one must sign such an affidavit before a Justice of Peace swearing that you do not own any other property, so this is standing operating procedure. Yet the Opposition would like to give the public the impression that this is burdensome or something prohibitive. Nothing could be further from the truth. That is why we on This Side are going to expose the folly of the Barbados Labour Party's Opposition.

Sir, they should not be opposing for opposing sake. In our modern system of Government, we expect responsible leadership from the House of Assembly, and the Opposition should really bear this in mind. They do not have to oppose for opposing sake. It calls for political maturity to support Government initiatives that are positive. I am saying that this initiative is positive and should really get bipartisan support. Let us keep the petty partisan polarisation aside if it would keep back the people of Barbados.

Sir, I am really at a loss to see why the Opposition would wish to seek to oppose this laudable initiative of this Administration.

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is grossly misleading the House.

Mr. SPEAKER: In what way, Honourable Member?

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: The Honourable Member is saying that This Side opposed the Bill. Nobody on This Side opposed the Bill. The Honourable Member is a Minister of the Crown. He must come in here and educate people rather than talking foolishness.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honorable Member, please withdraw the remark.

Mr. G. A. CLARKE: Sir, I withdraw the word "foolishness", but he is misleading the House.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honorable Member, please continue.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Sir, we are happy to be drawing them out one by one to effectively say that the Opposition supports the Bill which is before this House. Do not beat around the bush, say so. I am very happy that they finally admitted that. It was not This Side that talked about problems with an affidavit. As I said, this is standard operating procedure of a responsible government. This does not in any way reduce the accessibility of this facility to ordinary Barbadians, so let them support that as they should.

Sir, the issue is this. We heard from the Opposition the last time the Honourable House met on this matter, their concerns were if it would be feasible for persons seeking to claim this tax concession to keep bills over years. Who said they would have to present bills? One could have a blanket arrangement as long as you have the necessary certificate of completion, other affidavits and other facts to demonstrate that you, in fact, constructed the house, and on the presentation of a clear valuation you will receive the full rebate. Who said anything about producing

bills? We encourage the Opposition to stay tuned as we unravel the implementation of this project.

Sir, speaking about National Housing Corporation arrangements, there is nothing to say that as this policy is unravelled over time. There could be an arrangement similar to that at the National Housing Corporation, where persons at a low income level pay a lower price per square foot for land they buy from the National Housing Corporation, whereas people in the middle and upper incomes pay a higher price.

A similar scheme could be in operation here so that as time goes on, middle income Barbadians could still benefit from this concession, but we have to creep before we walk. A responsible government would not want to bankrupt the economy in this present situation, so we have to feel our way through in a responsible stage by stage implementation. Nothing is suggesting that the Democratic Labour Party Government would stop here. This is customary Government practice.

Sir, remember the tax concessions in terms of income tax. The earlier Barbados Labour Party Government started at \$13 000. The new Democratic Labour Party went up to \$15 000 and now it is over \$20 000. The Barbados Labour Party, when they assumed office in 1994, did not jump straight to the current rate. They went in stages. Why are they trying to fool the public that there is something strange in a phased implementation?

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, they must be consistent and not be hypocritical, because the public is educated. We are the children of the late Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow, who provided taxpayer-funded education from primary to tertiary, and the public will not be fooled by that Barbados Labour Party rhetoric, opposing for opposing sake. Sir, we hear them on the call-in programmes.

Mr. Speaker, the public thinks, and they appreciate, the ideological divide between the progressive Democratic Labour Party philosophy, and the reactionary Right Wing Conservative approach of the Barbados Labour Party, where their platform speakers take glory in trying to ridicule Honourable Members on This Side who have degrees and who do not.

This is why the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East had to run from them, because he does not have a degree. The Honourable Member for St. Thomas should really take note of these issues because of the conservative reactionary bourgeois of the Barbados Labour Party. Sir, as a Party, they are conservatives so they have no regard for working-class people. This is why the Honourable Member for St. James Central mentioned that they are very upset

that this policy reaches, and primarily focusses the working-class.

Mr. Speaker, the Barbados Labour Party has never really embraced the working-class. They really care more about the rich and famous and, I am not saying that they are not important but, the working-class must not be marginalised and abandoned in any way. Sir, the people of Barbados supported the Democratic Labour Party because they know that we are a caring administration.

Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill addresses the working classes. Therefore, the blue collar workers will benefit from this initiative. The clerical officers in Government, the vault attendants that the Honourable Member for St. James North mentioned in an earlier debate, the telephone operators, the MTW workers, the shop attendants in stores and hotel workers, be they the housekeeping staff, bartenders or waitresses, would also benefit from this initiative who, under the Barbados Labour Party Administration, would not have a dream in this world of ever owning their own home at this sort of level.

Mr. Speaker, under the Democratic Labour Party, this initiative, among others, they now have a fighting chance, a realistic opportunity to own a piece of this rock and to build a legacy in terms of housing, which they can enjoy for themselves and their families, and to improve their standard of living, and move those people who currently have outdoor toilet facilities to proper indoor plumbing, in terms of flushed toilets.

Sir, the Democratic Labour Party is interesting in uplifting the people, and not leaving the working-class to suffer, year after year, while the rich get richer. We want to uplift the people of Chapman Lane, New Orleans, Bay Land, Nelson Street, et cetera. We care about the working-class people of Barbados.

For example, Mr. Speaker, I heard the Honourable Member for St. George North referring to the Housing and Neighbourhood Upgrading Programme, but I remember before the last General Election, the Barbados Labour Party Government's approach to this programme, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). I am very much aware of it because I attended many of the Town Hall meetings. I remember senior Government officials lamenting that they had to dust this project off the shelves and resuscitate it. It was not a priority under the Barbados Labour Party Government.

Mr. Speaker, people on That Side admitted that the project took many years. The members of the public in Greenfield and other areas and in your area of the Garden Land, Mr. Speaker, had lost confidence in the Barbados Labour Party Government because, for decades, they were making empty promises and nothing was happening.

I remember at these Town Hall Meetings, Mr. Speaker, you did not have, in the first instance a permanent secretary there, certainly not the Member of Parliament for the City at the time, or any Minister of Housing. They had no time for that project and lower level Government employees had to pilot that project.

Mr. Speaker, now the Democratic Labour Party Administration has grabbed hold of this project. We have signed the loan agreement and I understand IADB officials were in the island recently and that project is moving forward, under the able leadership of the Minister of Housing, the Honourable Member for St. Philip North.

Sir, we are seeking to transform working-class communities, such as Cat's Castle and Greenfield in Bridgetown, Garden Land in your Constituency, Mr. Speaker, and other areas, where instead of pit toilets, those people will be able to get water-borne toilet facilities.

Sir, we are also going to widen streets, improve drainage, improve the accessibility of the houses to emergency vehicles, such as fire trucks and ambulances. We are going to create green spaces. There will be a massive improvement in the infrastructure in urban and rural Barbados in working-class communities, and transforming our society, a top priority of this Democratic Labour Party Government.

Therefore, the Barbados Labour Party can really lament that they have lost the opportunity given by the people to take this country forward. Sir, all that is happening is that they are crying over spilt milk. They were found wanting and were rejected by the public.

Mr. Speaker, they now have the audacity to tell the Democratic Labour Party Government how to govern. They had an opportunity and they spoiled their chances, so let them lick their wounds and really try and ask the Lord for forgiveness for their sins, and wait until the next Election and see what they can come up with, but the public had enough of them.

Sir, therefore, they can go up and down the country keeping a lot of noise but we are telling them that the public spoke in a massive way in support of the Democratic Labour Party. Sir, what the Barbados Labour Party should really do is what we call introspection.

Mr. Speaker, when the Democratic Labour Party lost the election previously, we were mature enough to have persons come from outside and investigate where we may have gone wrong, so that we could, as the young people say, wheel and come again. We came again and really inspired the public of Barbados that we are the Party to take this country forward.

We did not go up and down the country, opposing for opposing sake. The public of this country will not be fooled by any alarmist, Right Wing, Barbados Labour Party propaganda, seeking to destabilise the current normal Government and governance of our country for narrow political gains.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that this project is a clear start. It is not the “be all and end all”, but must be seen as a start in our way forward. Sir, our 2008 Manifesto at page 9 says that the Democratic Labour Party is philosophically committed to ensuring that every Barbadian resident has access to comfortable shelter. We commit to housing every last person.

“Under a Democratic Labour Party Government we will: .Provide 2 500 house spots for sale to low-income and middle-income wage earners in the first term of a DLP Government.

.Commit to building 2 000 housing solutions per year in the first term of a DLP Government.

.Provide 500 lots of land at \$5 per square foot for first time homeowners”.

These lots have been identified already and we are on the verge of allocating them to working-class Barbadians.

Mr. Speaker, all of these projects - including this current initiative when you realise what this project will do - will stimulate the economy.

The Honourable Member for St. Michael North East talked about an economic stimulus programme. She likes the words, but she does not understand that this is part of the Economic Stimulus Programme. Mr. Speaker, we are ensuring that more Barbadians now would have the confidence and courage to engage in house construction.

Mr. Speaker, this means that small contractors will be able to get some income, because they are not the big massive contractors that will be dealing with these low income earners. All that will be happening is that when an individual household decides to build their house and, sometimes, in the traditional Barbadian way when they start at the back and come forward as the funds come in, they are not going to get a big contractor.

They are going to get the small contractor, so he is able to keep his business afloat. Therefore, you are going to have his employees, or the persons that he works with, be they electricians, masons, plumbers, tilers or carpenters. Sir, these small working-class entrepreneurs in the construction sector will be kept employed under this initiative of the Democratic Labour Party.

11:10:15

Mr. Speaker, this is stimulating the economy. We are not into any fancy rhetoric. We are being functional and delivering the goods to the people of Barbados. This is in conjunction with the work of the Urban Development Commission and the Rural Development Commission where we are committed now, having dealt with all of the corruption that may have occurred under the Barbados Labour Party Administration, of contractors who were not qualified to be proper contractors.

Sir, having cleaned up that mess, we are well poised, and we have actually started, to escalate house repairs and house construction under the Rural Development Commission and the Urban Development Commission, along with the National Housing Corporation initiatives in the various areas, be they in Greens, Coverley and the other areas mentioned by the Honourable Member for St. James Central.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support this initiative. Certainly, as the Member of Parliament for the City of Bridgetown with many working-class districts, we are very excited about the tremendous possibilities that such an initiative and such a package of the Democratic Labour Party Administration will have in terms of transforming the landscape of working-class Barbadians and ensuring that economic activity is stimulated.

Sir, this is not just in terms of the contractors, but the persons who own the hardware stores, where you get the building suppliers will be kept in business so that their staff would not have to be laid off, be it their sale attendants or the persons who do freighting of the building materials.

Mr. Speaker, when these persons are kept employed in the economy, they would have greater disposable income that they could buy food from restaurants and clothing from stores, in other words, keeping the wheels of the economy turning ensuring that we ride through the current economic challenges that we have globally so that as a country we can be resilient and prosper under a Democratic Labour Party Government.

I thank you.

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

Miss C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am mystified at some of the comments I have heard from the Honourable Members on the Other Side when they speak of their performance so far in housing, and the fact that they have chosen to castigate the Barbados Labour Party for this social mess in housing, as was said by them, that the Barbados Labour Party did very little or nothing in 14 years

as a government and that there is a miracle Minister, referring to the Honourable Member for St. Philip North.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to speak first to the performance of the Barbados Labour Party as a government between 1994 and 2008. I speak from my notes because the Honourable Members on the Other Side seem to think that they can pull wool over the eyes of Barbadians.

Mr. Speaker, I have been a witness to the transformation of housing in Barbados when it comes to the Tenancies Freehold Purchase Act that has given thousands of Barbadians the opportunity to be able to own the piece of land that their parents and foreparents would have lived on as slaves.

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 and would need to correct that statement because, under the particular Act the Honourable Member is speaking about, it was not only the plantation owners that had to give up their land, but also some very poor persons.

As far as I know, the people who gained the land did not work for those persons as slaves, therefore, I would not want that to go out from this House. I do not think the Honourable Member deliberately mentioned that, but one could easily construe, if that statement is allowed, that persons like you and I enslaved persons to work for us.

Mr. SPEAKER: Very well, Honourable Member, please continue.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting thing that the Honourable Member for St. Lucy would say that when a few weeks ago on this Honourable Floor, the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown said that the Barbados Labour Party did nothing at all in the City.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. At no time did I use the word "nothing" in this regard to say that the Barbados Labour Party Government did nothing in the City.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you have the freedom of speech to say that, and the Honourable Member for St. Thomas has the freedom of speech to say that too.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: Mr. Speaker, I am saying that she is misleading the House. I never used that word.

Mr. SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. Honourable Member, please continue.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: Thank you, Sir. Democracy would not be challenged in here at all. Mr. Speaker, I come here to speak for the people and I shall do it as long as I am given the opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I want the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown to be aware that the Barbados Labour Party has done quite some extensive work in the City, particularly with housing, because the previous Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown, the Dame, always spoke to the issue of putting back life in a city and in any city in the world, and she identified many of them at that time. She spoke about people living in the City and of not shutting down Bridgetown in the evening and after 8.00 p.m. you hardly see anyone.

Therefore, the vision of the Barbados Labour Party of housing the City continued to unfold where we built the London Bourne Towers - that is a more recent one - Kensington Lodge, the first phase of Country Towers and Passage Gardens, and over the last three years the houses at Barbarees Hill for persons who are living in Lakes Folly and Pickwick Gap.

Mr. Speaker, I am appalled that the Honourable Member for St. Philip North will continue to speak about his miracle performance when the grass is growing so tall in front of those houses at Barbarees Hill and the residents have to be complaining all the time that they cannot get into them.

That is not all, Mr. Speaker. We made sure that persons living in the so-called slum areas, I would say the run-down areas, in Church Village near the Central Bank, were relocated and given houses and house spots, because the quality of life of the people in the City must be on par with the people living in any other part of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the Tenancies Freehold Purchase Act because that is a dear thing to my heart under an administration. Between 1976 and 1985, we saw the unfolding and the opening up of communities in tenancies. For me, the openings were phenomenal when we see the transformation in villages in Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I agree to an extent, that there are some private tenancies where persons would not have had the same privileges of acquiring the land at 10 cents per square foot, but a Barbados Labour Party Government, subsequent to that Tenancies Freehold Purchase Act, was able to bring legislation so that persons living on private tenancies could get their spots at \$2.50 per square foot with the Government subsidising the rest of the market value for those spots. That is something that people in the urban communities are benefitting from.

Mr. Speaker, that is not all. With the track record of the Barbados Labour Party, we saw the General Workers' Loan Fund, the Barbados Mortgage Finance Company Limited, CLICO Holdings Limited, the credit unions, the Housing Credit Fund and the other agencies coming on board to facilitate the needs of Barbadians.

Mr. Speaker, the Barbados Labour Party promoted a large percentage of property ownership among ordinary Barbadians and others during the period 1994 to 2008. Mr. Speaker, we also worked assiduously towards the 100 per cent mortgages.

Mr. Speaker, another aspect to the Barbados Labour Party's performance that has led to home-ownership has to do with the promotion of persons who were moved from the level of casual workers to permanent Government employees.

11.20 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, do you know why I speak to that? Sir, in the past those persons, the general workers, janitors, maids and other persons of that category, worked as casual workers and there was no proper surety as to what their pension would have been, et cetera. Sir, these people were looking at being able to achieve something or to leave something for their children during the period of their working lives. They did not want to be dependent on a government or on any social agency to help them to advance their cause.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation the Barbados Labour Party introduced for those persons to become permanent Government employees is the most significant thing that could have happened to Barbadians. Do you know why? They were able to get the Letter to show they are now appointed and that is why agencies such as the General Workers' Fund, the Housing Credit Fund, and the various lending agencies for mortgages, have been able to embrace them.

Sir, that Letter not only enabled them to take it to the agencies to borrow, it also gave them the opportunity to do other things, such as obtaining a visa and travelling. Sir, to be able to get other assistance, they could have gone to other agencies with that Letter of Appointment. They could have taken that Letter of appointment to show that they are permanent workers. Along with that Letter of Appointment, they could also carry their Title Deeds for the tenantry spots and the other spots that they were able to acquire to be able to get that assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I read the Manifesto of the Democratic Labour Party, particularly page 9 that speaks to a Democratic Labour Party when it had won the Government. At page 9 it says:

"The Democratic Labour Party is philosophically committed to ensuring that every Barbadian resident has access to comfortable shelter. We commit to Housing Every Last Person (HELP). Under such a programme the Democratic Labour Party:

In the first 100 days of a new DLP administration remove VAT from building materials on houses valued up to \$400 000."

Mr. Speaker, I now say this says that the Democratic Labour Party, as was said in 1994, does not see its Manifesto as a social contract. Do you know why? The legislation today refers to persons who will be first-time homeowners, with a maximum of \$150 000, would be the ones to benefit by that concession.

Sir, I think it is so wrong because I know that to build a house for \$150 000 is really a limitation on most people. We in the rural communities have large families and, therefore, when you want to build a three-bedroom house, as was the case when the Barbados Labour Party was looking at the Joint Venture Programme, those houses that were being built for \$40 000 and \$50 000 have now gone past that \$150 000.

Mr. Speaker, I support any effort by any Government to ensure that people are properly housed. Sir, that was always the vision of the Barbados Labour Party and that is why I am happy it is continuing. Sir, do you know what? Mr. Speaker, from the report that we will see, the National Housing Corporation's 31st Annual Report for the financial year 2003/2004, when I look at the performance of the Barbados Labour Party, which cannot be altered by anybody, because it is a fact of what has transpired in this document, Sir, at page 20, Sites and Services Status is as follows:

"St. MICHAEL: Jackman - 80 lots ; Lower Burney, 223 lots; Grazettes, 41 lots.

St. JAMES: West Terrace (Phase Two), 9 lots;

Lancaster (Phase One), 47 lots; Lancaster (Phase Two), 50 lots; Orange Hill, 48 lots.

Another aspect of Orange Hill, 4 lots; Husbands Terrace, 133 lots; Deane Town, 148 lots; Old Deane Town, 50 lots; Hoytes Village, 42 lots.

CHRIST CHURCH: Coverley, 177 lots.

St. LUCY: Mount Poyer, 35 lots.

ST. GEORGE: Walkers Development, 32 lots.

ST. JOSEPH: Blackman's, 120 lots.

ST. THOMAS: Arch Hall, 15 lots.”

Mr. Speaker, they are now into St. James Central, where houses are being built there and the street lights are in place. I went there last week.

Asides.

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

Hon. E. G. HUTSON: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House. There are no houses built at many of those lots, particularly at Lancaster, St. James Central, to which I can speak. There is nothing but bush.

Mr. SPEAKER: Please continue, Honourable Member.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, the reason the Honourable Member for St. Philip North could speak about housing - how he has been able to achieve 600 houses, is that the Honourable Member was building on the same sites and services that were implemented by a Barbados Labour Party. Sir, I have absolutely no problem with that because I believe in continuity and we are all Barbadians, but the vision came through the Barbados Labour Party and had we won the Government, we would have continued those programmes.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. James Central, perhaps, has not been to Arch Hall recently, which is now his Constituency. I go to Orange Hill and the ambience of Orange Hill and the Apes Hill Development is out of this world. Those are houses that were built by the Barbados Labour Party.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Philip North continues to be called “the Miracle Minister” and he speaks a lot about these housing units that are being offered freely to people.

Asides.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, I am not objecting to those things. The point I want to make, however, is that the Barbados Labour Party had made a decision that the units would have been sold to those persons who were living in their units.

Mr. Speaker, I want clearly to indicate that the ground work was done exceptionally well to prepare for the offering of those houses to persons. Therefore, when the Honourable Member for St. Philip North became the Minister of Housing and Lands, the Honourable Member

came and found that the firewalls were already put in place in most of them, if not all.

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

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House. Sir, every Honourable Member, different to the Honourable Member for St. Thomas, I believe, has stated the opposite. Sir, they have even gone on record saying to the people not to buy the houses because the ground work had not yet been prepared.

I heard that two Sundays ago, where two senior members of the Barbados Labour Party gave the impression that people should not buy the units because the ground work had not been done. They even told Barbadians that they should seek legal opinion on the matter.

Mr. SPEAKER: Please continue, Honourable Member.

Miss C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the Honourable Member for St. Lucy just came from. I do not know if he had conk to eat or what. The Honourable Member is not listening to me. Sir, this document, the 31st Annual Report of the National Housing Corporation has indicated at page 32, the number of asbestos roofs and firewalls that were completed. It lists Farm Garden, Wildey, Deacons, Wotton, Haynesville, Pleasant Hall, Bonnetts, the Ivy, Rosemont, Eden Lodge, Feirnehurst, Silver Hill, as some of those units.

Mr. Speaker, this is an excellent thing because we all know how asbestos can impact on one's health. I am happy that has happened and that the firewalls have been completed. Sir, a total of 930 asbestos roofs have been completed and 594 firewalls.

Sir, added to that at page 33, a number of land surveying allocations were done. Sir, an effort was also made to ensure that the lands were properly surveyed. I am saying that though the ground work would have been laid in respect of those areas, there were still other things to be done, some of which included wiring for those units.

His Honour K. St.C. BEST: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House. The Honourable Member indicated that the surveying was done and she mentioned the Ivy Housing Area as one of those areas. Sir, there was no survey done in the Ivy Housing Area.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, as I understand it, the Honourable Member is reading from a

report and I do not see what you are saying can be attributed to the Honourable Member.

11.30 a.m.

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the firewalls and I said that there were land surveying allocations being done then, and the name of the various communities have been identified. Sir, if I had time, I would go into them in detail...

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you have another 10 minutes, so time is not a restriction. I suggest that you do not bother about the other Members.

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Thank you very much, Sir. The estates that were identified for allocation were Haynesville - 59 units, Ivy - 64 units; and they have listed the names of the surveyors that would have been associated with carrying it out. Sir, Rosemont, Gall Hill, Waverley Cot, Wotton, Bagatelle - 31, Bayville Condos - 40, Kensington Lodge - 49, Wotton - 24, Wildey, Section A - 39 and Wildey Section Barbados - 56 and so on, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to dwell on that too much because I have a few more things to touch. Sir, the Rural Development Commission and the Urban Development Commission are two agencies that functioned to help to house Barbadians, the poor and the indigent, those who were disabled, persons living with HIV/AIDS and so on. The Honourable Member for the City got up a moment ago and objected to me by saying he did not say that the Barbados Labour Party did not do anything.

I want the Honourable Member for the City to tell Barbadians about the four houses in the City that were fixed, of which he knows well who the recipients were. Sir, there were not 10 in the City fixed over the year under the Urban Development Commission. The Honourable Member for the City should say who benefitted from the houses fixed under the Urban Development Commission in the City, and he might want to tell people where he is living too.

Asides.

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Sir, in the rural communities, there were thousands of Barbadians, especially senior citizens, who benefitted by the Rural Development Commission. Sir, you would appreciate that if you are transforming tenancies and the other communities with the Heights and Terraces, we cannot leave ordinary people in communities behind. Therefore, the performance of the Rural Development Commission was second to none, under the Barbados Labour Party. I challenge Honourable Members on the Other Side to tell me what is happening in rural Barbados today.

The then Honourable Minister, because they all have diminished portfolios now - the current Minister, the Senator, indicated in his speech that they would not be allocating money to roads and housing, in the same way that the Barbados Labour Party did, and would now be concentrating on agriculture, but he cannot even stop the snails from eating down Barbados because there is no snail bait.

Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous difficulty with the rhetoric from the Other Side.

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

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I really regret having to intervene while the Honourable Member is speaking, but I really must set the record straight.

The Honourable Member has reflected in commentary that the then substantive Minister, who sits in Another Place, responsible for the Rural Development Commission, has said or said that the Government would not be assigning or allocating any resources to deal with roads or houses. Sir, this is absolutely incorrect. In fact, let me state this for the records, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is the previous Administration, under the previous Minister of Finance, who issued instructions to stop the provision of resources to the Rural Development Commission for house replacement and house repairs.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commission, because of that action then proceeded to utilise monies for roads under the last Government to do houses because the money was stopped. Sir, that is the record and the Democratic Labour Party has restored it.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I keep having to remind you that the point is not to be used simply to state another version of what is being said. The Honourable Member, while she is speaking, has the right of free speech. You will get your chance, when you speak, to put your version of whatever it is.

The Honourable Member for St. Thomas.

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, I believe now that the Honourable Member, who just spoke, has the Urban Development Commission and the Rural Development Commission in his portfolio that he would try to do a better job. Sir, during the past year nothing has been done in the rural communities to ease the plight of persons, except that a consultation from the Democratic Labour Party went to work at the Rural Development Commission for all these months and nothing has happened. Sir, that is why the Senator who was responsible then, no longer has it under

his portfolio because nothing happened. Mr. Speaker, the under performance of those Ministers leave a lot to be desired.

Mr. Speaker, I want the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West to tell this Honourable Chamber where the \$4 million is that was in a below-the-line account for the Rural Development Commission to construct the Vendors' Mall at Bagatelle, in the Constituency of the Honourable Member for St. James Central, when the money was removed, gone elsewhere and we do not know where it has gone.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard about transparency, accountability, prudence and all the other things. Sir, the public needs to know where the funds of the public are because all of us, as taxpayers, have contributed to that project.

Mr. Speaker, there are two things I would like to say in the limited time I have. The Honourable Member for the City spoke about the Housing Neighbourhood Upgrade Programme. Sir, that project was in the works for more than 10 years and it is not the vision of the Democratic Labour Party.

Sir, as Member of Parliament for St. Thomas, I indicated that not only do you find communities where there are problems, as they are in the City and other urban communities but in St. Thomas, we do have the challenge with Allen View, what is happening with Harrison's Cave and these people who cannot build and expand in the way they would like because they are under such restrictions. Sir, it is not only Allen View but it is about four square miles of the parish where people are affected with their construction and expansion of their properties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member for the City continues to speak about it, as if it is his baby. It is the Barbados Labour Party's project that is being continued. I am happy that sewerage systems could be put place in Cat's Castle, Allen View, the Garden Land and those communities to be able to help to facilitate the needs of the people there with the upgrading of their houses and their communities. Sir, it is extremely important, and I do not want Honourable Members on the Other Side to support any effort because all the Barbados Labour Party left for the Democratic Labour Party, as a new Government to do, is to sign on the dotted line for the IADB Loan to be able to facilitate that project.

I want the US\$30 million to be put towards the Housing Neighbourhood Fund Project only, and not for buying house spots for people to help promote the project of the Democratic Labour Party because the Honourable Prime Minister made mention of it. The Honourable Member for St. Philip North has indicated that they would

try to purchase another 2 000 spots out of money that is specifically targeted for a project.

The Honourable Member for St. Philip North.

Hon. M.A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. I did not utter any statement in relation to the IADB Loan to be used to purchase any lots. The components, other than that Loan, suggest that \$14 million is set aside for land acquisition, a component of that programme. Sir, the Honourable Member should read the programme.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please continue.

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, I am not reading any programme. I read it in the newspaper and I know what is obtained in the project because I have my files.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you have two more minutes.

Miss. C. Y. FORDE: Thank you, Sir, I appreciate it very much. It is a wonderful morning.

11:40

The Honourable Member for St. Philip North is pompasetting about the houses he has built. Sir, "Mr. Miracle Minister", cannot be pulling wool over the eyes of the people in the various communities. The letters that were offered for the housing units cannot be taken anywhere. They cannot get a loan or mortgage, or qualify for insurance because of the challenges. Somebody's meter is on somebody's land and the wells are communal, therefore posing some problems. They cannot pass it on to their families because those conveyances are not in place, along with a number of other challenges.

Sir, my biggest concern is to impress upon this Administration to pay special attention to the persons who were living in the housing units for that period of time and who have paid in money, when we were the Government, to the tune of \$20 000 or \$30 000 to get their houses, to have those funds returned to them.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen parties at Ilaro Court and at other places for various people. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are being spent on food and drink, not to mention the summer camps. I spoke about those already, but I will get another chance to speak. The point is, those poor people who have gone to lending agencies for money to pay for their houses, and to own a piece of the rock, with the same commitment from Both Sides of this Honourable Chamber, have not been given back their money.

We are hearing that six hundred and something dollars have been collected for rent arrears. Sir, this is now a small matter, because it does not seem as though a lot of people will have to pay because the houses will now be free of cost.

Sir, I want the Honourable Member to make sure that measures are instituted to ensure that those persons who have been given their houses for free, receive the conveyances without delay, in order to qualify for loans for refurbishment and expansion of their properties because I know of the challenges one can experience in such matters.

Sir, I want to laud those individuals who will have to deal with those tireless aspects of the VAT rebate on the \$150 000. I am still waiting on this Government to make sure that opportunities are given to those persons who are building houses for \$160 000, \$180 000, \$200 000 or \$300 000. They too, as taxpayers, should get an opportunity to benefit from the measures instituted by this Democratic Labour Party Government.

I am extremely pleased to see that Barbadians will continue to acquire properties, in particular, on land the Barbados Labour Party Administration would have identified and made sure would have been in the land bank to assist this Government with its building project.

I am obliged to you, Sir.

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

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Sir, I always cherish the opportunity of speaking after the Honourable Member for St. Thomas, because it always falls to me to correct the myriad errors in relation to the record of the Barbados Labour Party. I believe we have to separate versions of that record. I think it is in the interest of fairness that the record be set straight.

Before I get into that, I would like, certainly on behalf of the constituents of Christ Church West Central, to commend the Government on this initiative to amend the Value Added Tax Act, which amendment will redound to the benefit of those low income potential homeowners, those persons who have never had an opportunity, under the Barbados Labour Party Government, to own a house.

I think that the programme is innovative. The benefits to the first time homeowners, especially single mothers, have been re-echoed to me. The feedback to me, both single mothers and single fathers will benefit from this initiative. In fact, the initiative will see a reduction to many people in the cost of living.

Sir, I think the moral import of this amendment is important as well, because it signals that the Democratic Labour Party is serious about keeping faith with the people of Barbados. It is the fulfilment of a budgetary initiative announced by the Honourable Member for St. John in the last Budget. It is so interesting because all of the facets of that initiative, announced in that Budget, are encapsulated within the amendment. Nothing that was promised has not been delivered in this amendment.

Sir, the Honourable Member for St. John, during the last Budget, made a very important call. I would like to re-echo that call because I think it is crucial in relation to the fulfillment of affordable housing in this country. I believe that call needs to be re-echoed.

The Honourable Member for St. John called on the banks, as well as the insurance companies in Barbados to register under, I think, the Mortgage Insurance Act in order to provide low income loans on properties up to \$150 000. The incentive for them was a reduction in the Corporate Profit Tax of 12.5 per cent on the profits made from such lending.

I believe that this is an opportunity for the banking sector and the insurance companies who were involved in the provision of mortgages to get into the area of low income mortgages in a way that will add further support to this initiative that is before the House today. I would like to re-echo that call.

It is important that the call made by the Honourable Prime Minister for contractors who are involved, or will become involved in the delivery of this low-income housing, that they too become registered under the Housing Incentive Act so that the benefits could accrue to the persons we are targetting in this particular initiative.

Sir, I want to focus a bit on what I call inaccuracies in the speech of the Honourable Member for St. Thomas. One of the last things she said was, the Rural Development Commission, over the last year did absolutely nothing in rural Barbados.

Sir, I have to correct that because, as the Member of Parliament for Christ Church West Central, I certainly can attest to the wonderful proactive work by the Rural Development Commission in my Constituency in providing relief to a number of persons who were the owners of derelict houses. I believe that programme, by the Rural Development Commission, applied to other Constituencies across Barbados.

Sir, Christ Church West Central is an example of the programme of refurbishing and, in some cases, new houses that were built for the elderly. The programme is continuing. It is not that the Government has been around

fourteen-and-a-half years as the Barbados Labour Party was, to say that programme has not been successful. It is a good example to show that the Honourable Member for St. Thomas certainly did not intend to portray an accurate picture of the Rural Development Commission when she spoke.

Sir, this issue of the provision of low income housing in Barbados is very important. The record of the Barbados Labour Party in relation to the provision of housing for lower income homeowners is rather dismal.

11.50 a.m.

I believe that if we were to be faithful to the record, when Members on the Other Side begin to speak of low income housing, they will be more atoned in their speech because, Mr. Speaker, there are several examples of failure by the Barbados Labour Party, in relation to adhering to its promises on low income housing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point to a few examples, and one is the Barbados Labour Party's Manifesto of 1999. The Honourable Member for St. Thomas in her speech before this House, touted the outstanding record of the Barbados Labour Party. I believe she said how glorious that record was over the period of 1994-2008.

Mr. Speaker, in that 1999 Manifesto, which is included in the period reviewed by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas, one of the initiatives intended to assist potential low income house owners, was the whole question of the provision of allowing persons to buy the National Housing Corporation's units.

Mr. Speaker, the Barbados Labour Party talked in that Manifesto of accelerating the sale of existing single, duplex and terraced units of the NHC. They committed to Barbados that the pricing of those units would have reflected the duration of the tenancy and the payment history of the tenants. Sir, we know that in between 1999 when that Manifesto was put before Barbadians, and 2003 when the new Barbados Labour Party Manifesto was written, there was a complete reversal of that policy.

In fact, in the 2003 Manifesto, Mr. Speaker, the Barbados Labour Party said that the basic purchase price will be 75 per cent of the value of the properties. Therefore, it moved from reflecting the duration of the tenancy to 75 per cent of the value of the properties as established by the Land Valuation Department.

Mr. Speaker, I know from my own experience and from speaking to the residents of the Gall Hill and Silver Hill Housing areas, that those who had to pay for their units had to chalk up thousands of dollars, in some cases, in excess of \$15 000, \$16 000 and \$17 000, where low

income families were required by the Barbados Labour Party Government to go cap-in-hand to banks to be able to afford their very expensive offer.

Mr. Speaker, contrast that to the policy which has been followed by this Democratic Labour Party Government where, irrespective to what they have said about the delivery of the Letters of Offer to persons who are qualified tenants so that they can own their housing units free of cost, the mere delivery of those letters meant that those tenants did not have to pay a single cent in rent, from that date.

Asides.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Therefore, it is not a question of just delivering a letter. The delivery of the Letter meant that persons did not have to pay any more rent. Of course, Mr. Speaker, the period of time during which the conveyancing process would take place, we all know takes a while to have that process in place.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is highly irresponsible and erroneous for the Honourable Member for St. Thomas to come into this House and make a claim that the Letter of Offer, delivered to the NHC tenants, was ineffective and meant nothing. Certainly, if I had the time, I would explain the legal process involved in the conveyancing to the Honourable Member, Sir, but I would allow her to find out that by asking questions, rather than getting up in the House and making these, at large, statements, designed to confuse the public of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go on a bit further because the Honourable Member also sought to paint a record by which she is saying that the Barbados Labour Party Government, when in office, had a very enviable record, Sir, but that record is not borne out by the accurate reports. Sir, I want to deal with one because it is interesting.

Mr. Speaker, I only want to deal with one year, the period of 2006-2007. While we have had in this Government to respond to the calls of Barbadians for the provision of low income housing, there are thousands of Barbadians, many in my Constituency, who apparently were overlooked by the successful policies of the Barbados Labour Party in the provision of housing.

Asides.

Mr. S. A. LASHLEY: Certainly.

My predecessor quarrelled in this House and the former Honourable Member for St. George South made plenty of noise in this House, trying to get the former Administration to do something in relation to provision of housing for low income persons. I ask the question, Mr.

Speaker, if their policy in relation to low income housing was successful, why is it that we are faced with so many thousands of Barbadians across Barbados who are asking for an opportunity to own their home?

Mr. Speaker, the Barbados Economic and Social Report of 2007, which is a document of this House, points to the kind of illusion, in my view, which has been painted by the Barbados Labour Party and the Member who just sat down, in relation to housing. Sir, I just want to cite a few paragraphs of that Report to show that even in the dying days of the last Administration, 2006/2007, they did virtually nothing in relation to the provision of low income housing in Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I want to focus on page 62 of that Report which deals with residential construction. This is also an indicator in relation to the construction of low income housing. The Report says, and I quote from page 62:

“During 2007, residential construction activity declined by 7.8 per cent to record 907 units, compared with 1 145 units built in 2006. The construction of wooden units fell by 11.5 per cent, masonry units by 24.6 per cent and mixed wood and wall units by 34.5 per cent.”

Therefore, I do not know what the Honourable Member for St. Thomas is talking about in relation to this record.

Mr. Speaker, the subject of mortgages is another failure by the former Administration. Sir, any policy that they had for the provision of low income housing was buttressed by a mortgage policy that would be affordable and accessible to those persons for whom they want to provide low income housing.

12:00:14

Mr. Speaker, page 63 of the Barbados Economic and Social Report, 2007, tells us why mortgages had declined in relation to the provision of housing. It says that approximately 1 128 new mortgages were extended during the review period ending September as compared to 1 139 in the previous year. That is another decline in relation to the provision of mortgages.

Mr. Speaker, that is why in the Budgetary Proposals, which were laid before this House by the Honourable Member for St. John, an appeal has gone out to the banks and insurance companies to register under the Housing Incentives Act. The two have to be connected. That shows, Mr. Speaker, the wisdom of the policy of not only providing a rebate in relation to VAT on building materials to potential homeowners, but ensuring that the two vital

components, both the mortgages as well as the construction cost...

Those contractors are brought on board to ensure that our intention to deliver really genuine low-income housing to Barbadians can be realised.

Mr. Speaker, I have no choice in my intervention but to expose a failed initiative under the Barbados Labour Party Government. The public ought to know that while the Barbados Labour Party Administration in their Manifestoes portrayed all the wonderful initiatives, beautiful language, in relation to housing and so on that they intended to do, the reality is that when you look at the facts, the facts show something completely different. Mr. Speaker, the facts helped to inform Barbadians why this Government is now required to do a lot of tidying up in relation to the housing policy of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to zoom in on the joint-venture programme which was touted in several Manifestoes of the Barbados Labour Party as being a vision to provide housing, targetting the middle, upper and lower income brackets in Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Honourable Member for St. Philip North has had reasons to point to this programme in the past, and I have no doubt that he would probably spend some time on it, in relation to showing why it is that we are having to divert valuable resources to correct the mess of the previous Administration in relation to the provision of housing.

Mr. Speaker, this Joint-Venture Programme announced in several of the previous Manifestoes of the Barbados Labour Party and launched in 2002 - still within the review period cited by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas as being an enviable record - was designed to bring on board developers who were required to finance and undertake infrastructural work for a number of developments, Coverley in Christ Church, Deanes Town Heights in St. James, Ellerton in St. George, Lancaster, St. James and so on.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that in the provision of that programme, we have had such a callous planning mechanism? There was no proper contracting arrangement to address a programme that was designed to alleviate the lot of medium, lower and upper income earners.

Mr. Speaker, you have a situation where the National Housing Corporation, under the watch of the Barbados Labour Party, entered into a five-year lease arrangement with developers that have hamstrung the National Housing Corporation and have frustrated hundreds of potential homeowners in their efforts to acquire their houses.

Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where, because of those arrangements, there are a number of persons who cannot say today that they can move into a house built by these contractors.

Mr. Speaker, under that programme, you clearly had a situation where, in terms of their ability to enter into such an arrangement based on their skilled expertise, the records of those contractors were never checked by the National Housing Corporation under the former Administration.

This resulted in a bungling in that Joint-Venture Programme, which meant that we have houses under construction in several parts of Barbados where the quality of workmanship is so poor that the National Housing Corporation - I believe the Honourable Minister can attest to this - has now to retain the services of quantity surveyors, and other authorities to look at that work to bring some measure of sense and sensibility to those projects.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that, at the end of the day, the bill will come to millions of dollars to make the corrections to that project. Mr. Speaker, rather than having a programme, as the Honourable Member for St. Thomas said that we could be proud of, we have had a bungling of an initiative designed to bring relief to persons who wanted homes.

Mr. Speaker, I hope going forward that the National Housing Corporation would be weary of these fancy names and titles and would enter into initiatives based on careful thought and analysis. Sir, if the former Government had done their homework in relation to this programme, they would have realised that the delivery of these major housing initiatives requires a really true joint-venture approach.

Mr. Speaker, "joint" means that you have to talk to the banks, the insurance companies and the other financial institutions that are financing the mortgages to get them on board to ensure the disbursement of funds, so that building can proceed in a manner that does not bring embarrassment to the potential homeowners. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, that was not done because you have had a situation where the same contractor was waiting for inordinate lengths of time to get draw-downs to proceed and to accelerate these projects.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, enough thought did not go into that and it is now left and fallen to the Honourable Member for St. Philip North to again spend tremendous human resources, time and money that could be diverted to the kind of programmes that you hear them shouting about on the platform. Sir, we have to put these facts so people can understand the true nature of this programme from 1994-

2008, which the Honourable Member for St. Thomas boasts about.

Mr. Speaker, when you read the files and you check the facts, you recognise that this programme was not so glorious after all.

12.10 p.m.

As a matter of fact, these programmes never existed, that is why we now are required to bring what I call some sensible approaches to the delivery of housing, particularly to that most vulnerable group, the lower income sector.

Mr. Speaker, having set the record straight in relation to where we are, and the divide that exists between how the Barbados Labour Party would have perceived and how they would have actually put together a housing programme, as opposed to how we are doing it, I want to say there is no question that this initiative to amend the Value Added Tax Act, coupled with the call by the Honourable Member for St. John for banks, insurance companies and contractors to get on board and to benefit from the various incentives that are available is to ensure that we can deliver low-income housing solutions to Barbadians.

I believe the constituents of Christ Church West Central would be happy and would embrace this amendment, particularly those who come to me indicating their wish to own their own homes, particularly the single mothers and fathers who have been left out of the housing plans of the Barbados Labour Party. Sir, these are the people whom we have determined, only within a few months of coming to office, that we would devise a programme to assist, would embrace this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage both the Ministry of Housing and Lands and the Ministry of Finance to ensure that the procedure, both for qualifying and taking advantage of the rebate in this amendment, is reduced in simple form and circulated around Barbados, so that persons whom we intend to benefit are aware that they have to apply for that benefit within two years of the completion or construction of their houses.

I would also want to encourage that the procedure is put out there in simple English, so that persons are aware, as they embark on their housing construction, what is the process in gaining the advantages and incentives under this proposed amendment.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I would like to state my support for this initiative and I certainly commend both the Ministry of Housing and Lands and the Ministry of Finance for bringing it to this Honourable House.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable member for St. John.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, normally I would not have entered this debate because I would have introduced this particular measure in my Budget and would have felt that it would not have been necessary for me to participate. Mr. Speaker, I listened to the opening presentations,

I listened to the responses by the Honourable Members for St. George North and Christ Church West. Sir, despite my attempt to watch some cricket this morning and to enjoy what would normally be the soothing antics and gymnastics of graceful cricketers, my ears were assaulted by a harangue of gossip and innuendo that I have never heard before.

I would not say its source, but this is a continuing predilection of certain persons who feel that by talking about things and by dropping what somebody told them on the telephone last night, and what they heard while driving to work, and this seeming cauldron of dissatisfaction which members and supporters of the Barbados Labour Party, seem to think they are going to whip up and boil in this country to sidetrack this Government from doing what it is doing, will achieve that objective.

Sir, I have to commend the Honourable Member for St. George North - the Honourable Member has asked me so I understand he wants me to clarify something - for the peons of praise that he showered on the head of the Honourable Member for St. Philip North.

Mr. Speaker, this is the test of performance. At no point did he say that the Minister is not performing. At no point did anybody over there say that the Minister is not performing. The only thing they tried to say is that what he is doing is what they had in the pipeline.

Mr. Speaker, there was a calypsonian from Cliff, St. John, who died many years ago off the cliffs of College Savannah, called "Informer". He was the brother of Mrs. Marion Hart, that outstanding culinary artist who was just nationally acknowledged. He used to sing a calypso called "The Drawing Board." He included the St. John Plan in it. I do not want to say he did not. There were a few things he wanted done but he also pointed out the large number of projects which Governments had on the drawing board. Sir, all that we came and found were on the drawing board.

I now see a National Housing Corporation re-energised, reinvigorated and responding to the needs of citizens. This was a National Housing Corporation that was mired in an arbitration proceedings, a debt we have to pay. This is a National Housing Corporation that had been given two major bond issues, one of \$50 million, the other

amount I do not remember, to provide housing in this country.

That National Housing Corporation took those bond issues and built offices with it instead, while thousands of people were lining up in Barbados to get houses. Therefore, the needs of ordinary Barbadians were not being met. The National Housing Corporation was building two office blocks, one of which was estimated to cost \$16 million, which would now cost the taxpayers in this country \$54 million, as a result of total incompetence. This was a National Housing Corporation that had to build new accommodation for itself, and I am not against that. This is a National Housing Corporation that promised all kinds of fancy houses, "Lady birds", "Pea Chinks" and not a single house was delivered under that programme. It was a National Housing Corporation that was collecting land in Barbados and hoarding it and this Parliament was, week after week, approving land acquisitions and vesting of thousands of acres of land in Barbados in a National Housing Corporation that was hoarding that land.

Sir, I would want to say that for the first time in the history of my time in Parliament, I heard about a land bank in which the Honourable Member for St. James North said had only deposits and no withdrawals. It is a National Housing Corporation that had been established in Barbados as the Housing Corporation by the Democratic Labour Party, to deliver houses to ordinary poor people in this country who could not normally afford housing.

That was a National Housing Corporation that was totally misdirected, misused, diverted and perverted from its course, under the legislation under which it was established, to building office blocks, to collecting applications and putting them away in files, and to collecting land in a land bank. Sir, meanwhile, thousands of Barbadians were lining up, waiting for housing and land. That is the record of the Barbados Labour Party.

Sir, a lot of Reports are being read now, Reports that they were not reading before, so that every time we say something, they could read all kinds of Reports about where units were to be built. It is a National Housing Corporation that had a project that had come to a halt in relation to those units. They could not get them finished but somebody is going to come here now and tell us where they were to be built.

12.20 p.m.

Sir, every piece of land on which we are building houses now you hear them say they were going to build houses. Sir, let me tell you the story of it.

Mr. Speaker, the land at Four Hill was going to be given to Hardwood Housing to build the house. Hardwood

Housing took deposits from 16 Barbadians and, to this day, they do not have houses, or they do not have money and, Sir, they are now trying to get back their money. Sir, they were going to give a project to build 400 houses to Hardwood Housing that could not build four pavilions. Hardwood Housing was given \$400 000 to build four pavilions, one in Brandons, one in Silver Sands, one in St. George and one in Proute.

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: Those are paid for already. If you want it back, go at the man's house in St. George, or go by the former Member for St. Michael North West and let him give you back the money. He collected enough out of it, so go by him and ask him back for what he got out of the project because the people who paid for the houses did not get anything, nor the Government that paid for the pavilions did not get anything.

Mr. Speaker, you have 1 600 lots that they were going to be put in the hands of a man that could not build 16 houses and they are telling you that he built 500 in Grenada, but nobody could produce a picture of them. They tell you to go on the Internet and you would see the picture but, to this day, it has not been produced and, Sir, that was their housing programme.

Mr. Speaker, do not mind the fulminations that you hear from certain Members in here, listing out all these projects that were going to be done because that is a school teacher approach. You have a lot of paper in front of you reading and think that we are being lectured and dictated to. Sir, meanwhile the Minister of Housing is out and about handing over conveyances.

Sir, while he is handing them over, Honourable Members on That Side are so insanely jealous of his achievements that they are on the radio telling him that he should read the Condominium Act, a man who never produced a conveyance. It is true that he did some of his tutelage under me...

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: Sir, a man, who did some tutelage under me; a man who could not, if you asked him, explain how a corporate entity is established under the Condominiums Act, could not produce a prospectus under the Condominium Act and would not know what a conveyance looks like under the Condominium Act, unlike the Honourable Member for St. Joseph because I know he would know, is on radio telling people that we have not informed them of their rights under the Condominium Act. Is the Crown bound by the Condominium Act? Sir, that is my first and only question. I am not going to go any further

than that. Sir, I urge the Honourable Member for St. Joseph...

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: Is the National Housing Corporation bound by the Condominium Act? There are lawyers in here so we could consult one of the distinguished Clerks and let them tell you.

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: At the end of the day, the Crown, the Government of Barbados, which owns the National Housing Corporation, would be liable for any problems that arise as a result of those sales.

I am saying to you that any lawyer worth his salt would have requisitioned, at the point of purchase, to ensure that the new owner of the property is protected because of the existence of joint wells, party walls or a roof that runs across the building. Mr. Speaker, any lawyer worth his salt can tell you this. It would only be a bread and fish lawyer that would have a conveyance like that, with no requisition ...

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: I know there are some Asides but do not shout people's names across the Floor like that, please. It is not going to be accepted. Honourable Member, please continue.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: Sir, no covenant, nothing on which their client could rely, if they have problems... Sir, let us be frank. It is a non-point. Sir, as I have said, they are so insanely jealous that I put on the radio one day and heard a discussion on housing in which people were saying that you had to inform them of their rights under the Condominium Act.

Mr. Speaker, where a conveyance is made under the Condominium Act, you inform them their rights under the Condominium Act. There are condominium type developments in Barbados in which people are selling properties, not under the Condominium Act. There is one in Clermont that I can point out and there are others. It is happening every day in Barbados because some lawyers, as the Honourable Member for St. Joseph would tell you, find the Condominium Act very cumbersome and difficult in relation to those sales.

Sir, that is a criticism levelled at your feet, but you continue to give out the conveyances because people call me on Saturday mornings and Sunday mornings to say "Thank you very much".

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: I listen to good things. I do not listen to gossip. Your problem is that you listen to gossip nonstop and you do not elevate that to a speech in Parliament. Mr. Speaker, Sir, not you. I know you much better than that. That is not your outlook.

Mr. Speaker, we are giving out the conveyances and we have offered a tax package. Sir, imagine the criticism of our tax package. We said we want to remove the VAT in respect of houses up to a value of \$400 000. We could not do it in our first year. Our first Budget came within the first...

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: Yes, in the Throne Speech we said "My Government is philosophically committed to ensuring that every Barbadian resident has access to comfortable shelter. It will, therefore, over time, remove that from building materials from houses valued over \$400 000; establish a home ownership revolving fund for public sector workers..."

Sir, we are now working on that.

"...provide 500 lots of land in five months at \$5 per square foot for first-time home owners. These lots have been identified and land will be acquired by private Treaty, where necessary to speed up the process.

Provide 2 500 house spots for sale to low and middle-income wage earners.

Initiate the full transfer of National Housing Corporation units to occupants living in the unit for 20 years or more free of cost, except for legal and transaction expenses."

And, Sir, we said, "over time".

Mr. Speaker, there are many Manifestoes of the Barbados Labour Party in which pledges were made; new labour legislation immediately upon assuming office. Sir, I could go through the list, but we are not so jejeune, childish and immature as to assume, as do some people, that a government can implement all of its promises overnight, especially a government that came and found \$80 million in debt with the Barbados National Oil Company and a project with the ABC Highway that had no certain figure on it, no drawings, no plans or no contract and, Sir, we will get to that shortly.

12.30 a.m.

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: You want me to talk about those things, but that is troubling. You should talk about the Nation, because the only coverage they could give you is what is in today's paper, from the meeting on Sunday night.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please ignore the asides and address the Chair.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: The same Nation that said the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation should carry your stories did not carry them from Sunday night either. There was nothing to carry...

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: I do not go to meetings of other political Parties.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, refrain from taking on Honourable Members like that.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: I am sorry. I would not unfair them anymore.

Sir, we cannot introduce all of our policies in a year and we never promised to. Therefore, the childish criticism it is not the removal of VAT up to \$400 000, something is wrong with that, which emanated from That Side, particularly from the Honourable Member for Christ Church West who needs to be rejected out of hand. We have started with \$150 000 and we are going to be moving as swiftly as possible to get to the \$400 000, before our term of office ends in this country.

I want the Honourable Member for Christ Church West, when he is visiting other construction sites, to drive up to Six Roads, St. Philip, and take a look opposite the Six Roads Market at the houses that have been built in one year under the Democratic Labour Party. Go to Work Hall, St. Philip...

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: It does not matter who it is. The houses are built. Those people existed in your time too and you could not get them to build houses. Why? Something would have to be wrong if there were people who could build those houses in that space of time that you could not get to build them, and thousands of Barbadians were waiting for houses in this country. Either Government has to do it itself or it has to provide the framework that encourages the private sector to go out there to build houses, and we have done both things.

Sir, the National Housing Corporation - I compliment the Minister for getting the National Housing

Corporation back on track. You are doing an excellent job. Many Barbadians feel that way.

I go on to the Rural Development Commission and Urban Development Commission. In respect of the Urban Development Commission, the Government has indicated what its challenges have been. Only Phase 1 of the Forensic Report has been done. If the Honourable Members on That Side could go out and identify the houses that went missing, then the Urban Development Commission would be able to say that it has a list of houses that it built.

Sir, can you imagine that they built houses and you cannot find the houses, and people would trust them to be telling us that they could initiate a housing programme in this country? Houses in Barbados disappeared overnight, not cars, not chattels that can be moved, whole houses that disappeared. Therefore, when we are finished with Phase 2 of the Forensic Investigation, we will get further in the process.

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: He has not found all. He has not found the ones in your Constituency yet. I do not know where they are. I told you to walk around and find them.

The Rural Development Commission has done considerable work in the past year. I can speak about at least five houses that were constructed in the Constituency of St. John, A constituency that had no houses constructed under the Rural Development Commission previously. Imagine you can have a Chairman of the Rural Development Commission that ran against me as a candidate...

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: I am not interested in anybody giving me anything. I want the people of St. John to get what is their due in Barbados. Nobody gave me anything. The people of St. John pay taxes. The people of Christ Church South pay taxes. The people of St. Michael South pay taxes, and we therefore expect that the resources will be fairly balanced across this country. That is all we are asking for. Do not mix it up with the bills of quantities that you have in your pocket when you put it away, all the different valuation reports and so on, Put that safely away.

Sir, we are looking to try and develop a corridor of housing from Kendal Hill right up to the ABC Highway, that part that leads to the Airport into Bushy Park.

Sir, we have had some challenges with respect to water.

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: I do not know who it belongs to. It is along that Highway into Bushy Park.

Sir, we would like to find water resources to deal with that particular development and we are working very assiduously because we believe that we need to find housing for our people. We need to find land on which contractors can build, and we need to continue the hard work which has been started by this Government.

Sir, there are also other concerns which the Ministry of Housing had to contend with. We have had a situation in Bath, St. John, of squatters. It is not only St. Michael East, the Belle. Government owns land in Bath, St. John, on which we have squatters that we are going to have to deal with in terms of development.

You have old developments like College Savannah, St. John, which is really supposed to be a tenantry, but on which people have built new houses, not chattel houses. Some houses face the sea and some face the road. We cannot align roads. There are other areas and there are other challenges.

Sir, there has been the challenge of Lynches, St. Philip. I do not know if it has been resolved yet, and we can go through the list of other situations where people are being deprived of the opportunity to have a conveyance to their land, so that they can get on with their business and do what they need to do.

Therefore, I thought it necessary, in the context of this debate, to reiterate what has been achieved. We have been in office for just over a year.

Asides.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: That might be too long for you but you have four more years to wait on top of that, and you might have many after that as well.

Sir, we have been able to get lots in the tenancies identified across Barbados. All of those tenancies which had excess lots, the Ministry of Housing had been able to identify them, have the surveyors go in and start the process of delivering land particularly to the people in the rural areas, St. Lucy and St. John, where people would be able to build their own houses.

That is one of the things that is the difference between rural and urban Barbados. If you give a man a piece of land, he would make a start. Therefore, the 500 lot programme is designed on helping those people in particular.

The fellow who can get a cricket team to come out a Saturday and put down the foundation, and three months later he could get them to come and lay the floor, five months later do something else, these things have been happening. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy has argued for it and I have argued for it. That is what that particular programme is all about.

Sir, you have the units being given to the tenants in a short space of time. Again, I congratulate the Minister for that. You have this tax package, never before in the history of Barbados. We said that the cost of living was a problem. It would have removed the Value Added Tax and it should provide some ease for low income owners. That is the objective of this particular programme.

12.40 a.m.

Asides.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: The National Housing Corporation is once again on its programme to ensure that it can deliver houses to the people of this country. The Rural Development Commission and Urban Development Commission are doing their work now to ensure that they can deliver housing to those persons who are the least well off but, more importantly, the Joint Venture Programme that Government has entered with private sector builders for low income housing.

Remember we were told, more than 14 years, that you cannot get private sector people to build low income houses. It is not profitable. They do not like it. Therefore, we were building up land and doing nothing creative. Sir, we sat them down and said: "Gentlemen, we know you have been doing work on the West Coast. We know we are coming out of the building boom. We now need houses for our people." Sir, within a matter of days, they were able to go on the sites, which the Minister identified, and start the Housing Every Last Person programme, in this country.

Asides.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Therefore, you mean to say that it could be so easy to get that achieved? We did not import anybody. We did not import 3S to do it. We did not import ANSA McAlpine to do them. We did not import a company from Trinidad to build them. These are Barbadians that have the equipment and have been willing to build houses for the last 20 years, whom we mobilised for the benefit of the people of this country.

Sir, I cannot understand why, with all the genius that the Other Side was supposed to have, all the brilliant lawyers, economists, accountants, the "A" Team, the Better for Barbados Team, the Now More Than Ever Team could not get a housing programme going in this country, using

the best Barbadian contractors, and using the land which is available in selected areas.

Mr. Speaker, we have not gone for any large swards of agricultural land. Work Hall is a small area. Opposite the Six Roads' Market is a small area of land. We have not taken any large acreage out of agricultural production. We went into tenancies on lots that were next to housing lots. These are not things that we did not talk about in here for 14 years.

Sir, for 14 years we have been asking the Government to go into the tenancies. You put in the roads. You do not need to put in light. You do not need to put in water. You do not need to put in any amenities. The Honourable Member for St. George North will tell you that we pleaded time and time again.

I even identified tenancies in constituencies in which the Honourable Members were Representatives, such as Woodland and Todds. Those were in St. George South, which was then represented by the former Member for St. George South. We have a long road leading into Todds and Woodland, also Linear Developments where a surveyor could simply go, put down some line marks.

Asides.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Or some ribbon. Well they are linear, but you are right. For example, the one in Constant, if it had been pursued, would have been a ribbon development. Therefore, things are not difficult to achieve, but you must have the will, and the interest of the people at heart. I compliment the Minister of Housing and the entire Cabinet because everybody worked hard.

This housing programme that we designed was not designed on the back of a napkin, like the Declaration of Financial Assets that was given to the House of Assembly in the last Budget. This was a programme that we sat down with serious people, looked through all of the options that were available and systematically determined how we would get it done. The first few months were tough on the Minister, because he knows that every week I was on his case.

Sir, there are competing interests in Barbados. I am going to bring up this point because there are a lot of people who do not want to hear it. I am not afraid to speak about it. We had to use some of the larger contractors in this country.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, sorry. I hate to interrupt you at this time, but because of predetermined official business, it is convenient for us to take a suspension at this time. Perhaps, we can continue after lunch.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: Sir, thank you. I am going to wrap up on this one point now.

I was making the point that we must have a partnership, not only between Government and the contractors, but between the larger contractors and the smaller contractors. Therefore, we see it as a triangle in which the larger contractors can let the smaller contractors do the finishes and can be involved in this process.

As I said, the Minister had to be assiduous in doing it. He has taken a lot of pressure from us because all of us have said to him, we need houses. Therefore, I compliment the Minister of Housing for a job well done.

Asides.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON: As I said, you will be praised on This Side, and by the statements of the Honourable Members on That Side, except one because I would not call that a statement, but the comments of Members on That Side have all confirmed that you are doing a good job, and I congratulate the Minister of Housing, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this Sitting be suspended until 1.50 p.m. today.

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

The question that the Sitting be now suspended until 1.50 p.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER suspended the Sitting accordingly.

12.46 a.m.

RESUMPTION

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: This Sitting is resumed. The Honourable Member for St. James North.

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the adversarial nature of Barbadian politics as is, often causes divide, sometimes bitterness. It is indeed unfortunate that this adversarial approach now appears to be all-pervasive. Permit me, Sir, some moments to highlight some of the achievements, not all, of the Barbados Labour Party as far as housing and land are concerned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in circumstances where the Honourable Member for St. Philip North has been publicly seen to be presenting papers and conveyances to persons in terraced units, I want to know what is the Government's position in respect of long-standing tenants who are still in

arrears, and whose arrears may have been caused through poverty and misfortune? In other words, what is the position as regard those tenants long-standing in arrears?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we live in a culture where long-tenure is being more and more seen as being equivalent to a right of property. If you go around Barbados, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which I am sure you do, you would come across instances of people renting a spot or two spots for 40 or 50 years. Sir, either they cannot find the true owner, or the landlord would not cooperate or they are just not being given a chance to buy the spots.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a country boy, like the Honourable Member for St. Philip North - I do not use the term country boy pejoratively - as well as the Honourable Member for St. Philip South, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy and others, we were raised in a culture where in rural Barbados we wanted a lot of land, not a "lotta" land on which to build our own individual houses. Sir, this puts me to the point that during its time, the Barbados Labour Party provided close to 2 000 house lots at various points in Barbados.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the problems that confronted the National Housing Corporation up until recently was that it was cash-trapped for years and years. I hope that what I am hearing, that there is going to be a substantial cash injection materialising. The reason being that if the National Housing Corporation is not properly financed, then its programmes and projects would not proceed apace.

I also want to have addressed by this Honourable House, a long-standing ongoing problem that tends to affect significant numbers of Barbadians. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me use the Pine as an example. Persons from the Pine have complained to me that when they want repairs and ordinary maintenance done, maintenance of wells, repairs to roofs and such like, that sometimes they are treated very roughly, not by the political class, but by technocrats and technical people who do not seem to have a heart for poor people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I talk about this question of maintenance, I want to know if the National Housing Corporation has any immediate plans to ensure that all wells are in proper shape, that all repairs are going to be put right and that the roofs are in good order. Sir, do any of the units still have asbestos roofs?

I refer to the adversarial nature of the body politics of Barbados. Permit me as a Barbados Labour Party partisan to remind this Honourable House that a Barbados Labour Party Administration offered income tax concessions of up to \$10 000 per year for repairs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Members are smiling because obviously their lunches were enjoyable and the cricket is at a stage where that too seems to be enjoyable as of now. We do not know what will happen to the cricket later.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Administration introduced a policy where, when you file your Income Tax return - and I would like all Barbadians to file their returns, even when they feel that they ought not to file them - and you can show that you have repaired your house, you can claim up to \$10 000 as a concession of your Income Tax liability. In fact, I believe that there is an income tax liability provision that if you pay mortgage interest up to a certain amount of money, under the Barbados Labour Party governance, you could claim that too as a tax concession.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Barbados Labour Party inherited the Government in 1994, there can be no doubt that the trying economic circumstances that we saw in this country between 1991 and 1994 have had an impact on our social services. That critical period saw not just problems of cash, and cash flow, with the National Housing Corporation, but a decline in the morale at the National Housing Corporation, and a decline in the expectations that Barbadians had about the capacity of the National Housing Corporation to deliver.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that type of cynicism where poor people are of the opinion that the National Housing Corporation either takes them for a ride, makes them wait long, or puts them on fair promises, still obtains.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some people would tell you that they applied 25 or 30 years ago and they either did not hear anything or were given a number. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is so bad that some individuals have applied to the National Housing Corporation more than once in the hope that something would happen.

Sir, I am hopeful that the National Housing Corporation can be re-energised and ensure that what the Barbados Labour Party did in relation to the General Workers' Loan Fund in terms of re-energising it, can impact positively on the expectations, hopes and desires of Barbadians.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is the General Workers' Loan Fund? That is a loan fund that was put in place to facilitate private housing development and to assist workers to be able to access public sector-type funding for purposes to do with housing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would urge the Honourable Member, as someone from rural Barbados, to make sure

that the Fund is at healthy levels, in circumstances where not every Barbadian is going to be comfortable in a terraced unit.

Sir, so long as Barbadians can access funding, they will probably build single houses of various costs and various dimensions for themselves. The cap figure in relation to vatable relief is \$150 000, but we need to have a situation where every piece of "qualifying land" that can be taken is used for housing.

What is "qualifying land"? Qualifying land is marginal land not useful for agriculture nor for anything of direct economic value. Sir, with that, we must have a policy where even though I am speaking as a hard-core Barbados Labour Party member, it still behoves me to say that Government should pick up two huge estates somewhere in Barbados that have marginal land and convert that into housing. I am giving ideas to my political opponents but my Side is not going to expel me for that.

His Excellency D. St.E. KELLMAN: On a point of order. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House. Sir, I was going to forgive him, seeing that the Honourable Member was once my teacher, but the Honourable Member has been here since 1994. Sir, the Honourable Member knows that the idea he is proffering is not new.

Sir, it goes further. The point was also made that when the Ministry of Transport and Works built roads where people lived, those persons are not to be charged for that service. The point was also made that the Ministry of Transport and Works should give large masses of land to the people of Barbados at land cost, and that those lands should be provided with the amenities. Sir, the Honourable Member knows this is nothing new.

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I too had a good lunch and would, therefore, defer to the Honourable Member. I would not seek to rebut him on this occasion. Sir, suffice it to say that where the question of land and roads come in, highly relevant to this matter is - and I want the Minister to listen - the sites and services programme as conceived. It can be refined.

It can be worked on, but with housing goes sites and services and it is best, in some cases, for the National Housing Corporation and builders of houses, to look after specific sites and services than to leave them to the Rural Development Commission and the Urban Development Commission.

The Rural Development Commission, the Urban Development Commission and the National Housing Corporation are going to have to find a way of coordinating their activities to avoid overlapping and duplication.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, earlier in this debate we heard two things. We heard that when the Tenancies Freehold Purchase Act, that revolutionary piece of legislation passed by the Barbados Labour Party, people outside of plantation tenancies lost land or lost the opportunity to keep that land. What is the true situation is that Cap. 239 (B) has something called the First Schedule, which sets out the list of plantation tenancies that are to be sold at 10 cents per square foot. Nowhere in the First Schedule are privately-owned tenancies designated under that particular Schedule. However - and I really know that you as Mr. Deputy Speaker and as the Member for a St. Michael constituency must know - there exist myriad non-plantation tenancies, particularly in St. Michael.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the area of the substantive Speaker, there can be as many as 40 non-plantation tenancies. Sir, the policy of the Barbados Labour Party was for Government to assist tenants in those non-plantation tenancies. Those tenancies would be valued basically at \$2.50 per square foot, which would be the maximum, then subject to a proper evaluation, Government would top up the rest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was also mentioned that College Savannah Tenantry has tenants who have not yet got titles to their land. Sir, if you look at Cap. 239 (B), College Savannah is not in the Schedule. What does that mean? It means that College Savannah can be a Cinderella flagship for other tenancies that should be in the Schedule.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Cap. 239(B) went through some amendments, one of which was that in non-plantation tenancies, the maximum purchase price a tenant would pay would be \$2.50 per square foot, and that the Government would take responsibility for payment of the rest of the purchase price, subject to a fair valuation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we live in modern times and this Barbados has inherited not only a rich but an interesting legacy. We have something called Zone 1, which is problematic. Sir, there are Caribbean countries with richer and more plentiful water resources than Barbados and these countries do not have Zone 1 rating.

Sir, I do not know if the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central could advise us for free and not for a fee but do we have any engineering experts who could find a solution in relation to this Zone 1 problem? Sir, there are entire constituencies, including the Constituency of the Honourable Deputy Speaker, that are hard-hit by Zone 1 regulations where persons in these constituencies cannot build. In fact, in the whole scenario where squatting has, unfortunately, become part of the culture - it was not an original part of Barbadian culture - as we work to see where land is readily available and where land is scarce, we have to see whether some Zone 1 lands cannot be de-zoned

or re-designated, the aim being to get some of it in housing, but there is a problem with Zone 1 land.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my heart goes out to those people who are refused planning permission because of the Zone 1 regulations. I do not know if there is an engineering solution to the problem. I hope there is, and I am asking the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central to advise this Honourable House, free of charge, on this matter because there are a lot of people who do not want to be uprooted.

There are persons who live close to Zone 1, who want a spot in the neighbourhood. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would want to say that the way things are, one side of the road can be Zone 1 and the other side Zone 3 or a different zone, but we have this problem with Zone 1.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it seems to me that even for agriculture, the non-political authorities are somewhat skeptical about using Zone 1 land because of the use of fertilisers and chemicals in the zone. Therefore, we are between a rock and a hard place, Zone 1 cannot be used for housing and, in some instances, depending on the state of the watertable, Zone 1 land in certain areas are seen to be unsuitable, even for agriculture and pasturing.

2.10 p.m.

Sir, I did say that in our adversarial political culture we often get a little heated and, Sir, we are duty bound, not only to represent our constituencies well, but we are duty bound, as partisan, to present the case for our Party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me, as I am presenting the case on behalf of the Barbados Labour Party, to say that we introduced and inspired 100 per cent mortgages in Barbados. Sir, if you remember the days when, on the purchase of property, you had always to pay down a minimum of 10 per cent and then find the balance, in a situation where some stakeholders holding the 10 per cent would get impatient with people and seize their deposit if they could not raise the balance of the purchase price within a short period of time, we thought it prudent to introduce 100 per cent mortgages.

Sir, not unrelated to this policy, we also said that while it is true that a person 25 years or younger working would easily qualify to pay back his or her mortgage over 20 years, we still felt an obligation, based on policy, to lengthen the period from 20 years to 40 years. Sir, that helps young people even more, because of life expectancy and their capacity, if they are working for a good, steady income to raise money and pay back over a 40-year period. Then, if you could pay the 40 years in 20 years, the repayment period, per period, per month should be lower.

Sir, these are some of the things the Barbados Labour Party introduced.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we provided some house spots. We provided 100 per cent mortgages. We provided an extension of the loan repayment period and we are urging the Government to look at the First Schedule of Cap. 2, 39(B) and get in all the plantations. It means that the Honourable Member and his staff must now do an audit of all those plantations on which our forefathers toiled and know the situation where there are tenantry lands belonging to plantations where people should be able to access those lands at \$0.10 cents per square foot.

Sir, for a fact, as I said earlier, College Savannah, St. George is not in the First Schedule. Perhaps, it is left out through error because College Savannah, if parts of it are in St. Philip, still is not there. I believe Fortesque is in but....

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. Sir, College Savannah would not be listed as College Savannah because College Savannah is part of Codrington Estates, part of the College Land Tenantry. I do not think there was ever a plantation called College Savannah Plantation. It may be under another name. I do not know but possibly College Land or Codrington.

Mr. R.C. EASTMOND: Thank you very much for that. I have no objection at all to be corrected. As a former teacher, I take correction and, Sir, as a former teacher, I must know that I could stand corrected, especially by certain people of distinction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I trust that this whole Parliament truly appreciates that in the last two years, perhaps the biggest political issues and the biggest political bone of contention has been housing. His Side is going to support this legislation. Personally, I have no objection to a phased policy by which you could start at one figure and gradually go up.

Asides.

Mr. R.C. EASTMOND: Sir, the reason is obvious. Government does not have unlimited amounts of funds to play with. In our time, we found that we did not have unlimited amounts of funds to play with. A fair Barbadian, a Barbadian patriot, a Barbadian with some socialism or some social democracy in him or her, would know that when a government, as the Democratic Labour Party follows the Barbados Labour Party would do, it is to allocate some of the scarce resources to particular programmes that do not yield money.

Sir, a lot of what governance is about, is not related to raising money or making money. A lot of what governance is about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is facilitating

people and I trust, Sir, that following the excellent example set by the Honourable Member for St. George North, that we get the National Housing Corporation and, by extension, the Minister of Housing so fine-tuned that Barbados would be able to benefit from their programmes and benefits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these remarks, I am very much deeply obliged to you.

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. S.D. BLACKETT: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to make a brief contribution to this amendment debate. Sir, before I do so, the Honourable Member, who just took his seat, has to remind us and I think himself, no less than about three times, that he is Barbados Labour Party partisan, a Barbados Labour Party member and that he is still a member of the Barbados Labour Party.

I am wondering if he was severely reprimanded for not attending the sparsely attended meeting at Codrington and for not robustly defending the Barbados Labour Party in the past.

Mr. R.C. EASTMOND: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. I did go to the meeting and it was not sparsely attended at all. I went to Church first and, therefore, I cannot lie to you. Honourable Members in here know that I went to Church first and then went to the meeting. Thank you, Sir.

Hon. S.D. BLACKETT: Sir, you know how to set your priorities, Church before Party. Sir, I too would want to add my encomium to the contribution of the Minister of Housing and also the staff of the National Housing Corporation and, by extension, the Minister of Housing for I, too, have observed that they are doing a tremendous job in realising the dreams of the Democratic Labour Party when it comes to delivering housing solutions to Barbadians.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas on a number of occasions spoke about the Honourable Minister in terms, to my mind, bordering on blasphemy but, the Honourable Member would have to deal with her God and the blasphemy. She referred to the Miracle Minister but, Sir, the last time I checked, the only person who would be responsible for miracles would be the good God himself. Certainly, it has nothing to do with any miracle. It simply is that the officials of the Ministry and the officials at the National Housing Corporation, for the first time in 14 years, now have a road map to follow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it now has a focussed compass that would direct them. They also have solid plans, clearly delineating the direction in which they would take the Corporation and also to realise the dreams and aspirations of the average Barbadian citizen. They also, the formerly maligned civil servants, who work in those Departments are now encouraged to deliver the goods because they see us as their rescuers and they also have a Minister who is leading by example.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has absolutely nothing to do with miracles. It is simply a case that the path is clearly delineated, clearly focussed and they are delivering the goods to the people of Barbados. Sir, I constantly hear Honourable Members on the Other Side talk about the programme that we have implemented regarding the 20-years' qualification in housing as if they begrudge the residents of these housing estates for what we are delivering to them.

14.20 a.m.

I am wondering if sometimes they have any of these residents living in their particular constituencies how can they face these residents? How can they explain to them that every time they open their mouths about this particular aspect of our housing programme, they are constantly saying they want the money refunded to the people who actually paid money into the National Housing Corporation.

Sir, they got up one morning, washed their faces and hands and went down to the Roebuck Street Headquarters and clearly enunciated that is a policy for them. That was their policy. Our policy is clear. If you are living in the houses for 20 years, your rents are not in arrears, then you will be given the title deeds to your house. They would have to address who paid the money to them in the past. This is a new approach that we are presenting to the people of Barbados.

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

Dr. W.F. DUGUID: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. Monies would have been paid into the National Housing Corporation. When the Government changed, the National Housing Corporation did not change. It is still the National Housing Corporation that would have received the money. Therefore, it is the National Housing Corporation which has not changed that should look to refund.

The Honourable Member is purporting to suggest that it is the Barbados Labour Party that received money. The Barbados Labour Party did not receive money. It did not have any houses to sell. It was the National Housing

Corporation which continues to be an entity which should return the people's deposits.

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

Hon. S.D. BLACKETT: Sir, instead of making a case for the Barbados Labour Party, he should be asking the residents for forgiveness. Our policy is clearly laid out, 20 years in the house, no arrears and you will be presented with your title deeds. They will have to deal with the residents.

Sir, they are certainly out of step with the people because most residents in the housing areas are clamouring for this particular programme that we are offering to them. It is entirely up to them. They would have to seek forgiveness from the residents when they go to visit house to house, if they do, in the first place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Manifesto pledged that we would have approached this particular concession regarding the VAT, on the input of material in the cost of a house of \$150 000 or less. That is clear.

Sir, as Honourable Members on This Side would have said, we said \$400 000, but, of course, fiscal prudence would dictate that we would have a phased period. Whatever relief people receive, as they approach their building, is a relief, and one that I imagine will be appreciated by the vast majority of people who are first-time owners of homes, and this, of course, would be some relief to them.

Sir, we are providing the housing, the solutions and the means by which these solutions will be delivered to the good people of Barbados. Whenever I am going to support anything that will impact directly on the people of Barbados, I always ask myself one question. If the question is answered in the positive, then I go with that. What will these amendments do for the people, especially the people in St. Michael Central and, by extension, the people of Barbados? Are they positive? Will they impact in a positive way on the people of Barbados? Once that question is answered as a clear "yes", then I throw my entire support behind it.

Sir, a refund of 7 per cent of Value Added Tax up to \$150 000, when we do the arithmetic it works out to roughly about \$2 000 that any new home owner would save on the construction or purchase of a house. I ask myself also, will it assist potential first-time home owners? I say "yes". Would it realise their dreams of leaving a property for their progeny? I say "yes"? Is it moving some of the people from exorbitant rental units and enabling them to own their own properties? I say yes. What would all of this cost? Sir, \$3 500 a month combined family income, which

is not unreachable. Most families if they want to have a roof over their head, they simply have to pool their resources to qualify under this particular programme. To my mind, this is commendable.

Dr. W.F. DUGUID: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Honourable Member is now suggesting that you have to reach \$3 500 a month to be able to qualify. Is this now the intention of the Bill? The Honourable Member who just took his seat has to clarify this, because he just said it is not unreachable and people should be able to reach it. That suggests that one must earn \$3 500 a month to qualify. Please clarify this.

Hon. S.D. BLACKETT: Sir, the point remains that several of my constituents and his constituents will benefit from this particular programme. It will empower them. Yesterday, people who thought that owning a house was unreachable, know today that dream could be realised in clear terms.

Dr. W.F. DUGUID: On a point of order. The Honourable Member continues to mislead the House. He just made the assumption that you have to reach \$3 500 to qualify. Is this now the intention of this Bill or is it not? The Honourable Member is misleading the House either way, which one is it?

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

Hon. S.D. BLACKETT: Sir, recently, on Saturday morning...I just want to make this point because I still believe that the spirit of philanthropy and generosity is alive and well in Barbados. We were asked to travel over to Orange Hill to receive a plot of land.

Dr. W.F. DUGUID: On a point order. I am asking for a clarification. The Honourable Member misled this House. He just said that it is easy for people to reach \$3 500.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Christ Church West, as I see it, you are continually repeating yourself. Please allow the Honourable Member for St. Michael Central to continue.

Dr. W.F. DUGUID: I thank you for your ruling.

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

Hon. S.D. BLACKETT: Sir, \$42 000 a year works out to \$3 500 a month. I do not understand it, simple arithmetic.

Asides.

Hon. S.D. BLACKETT: Sir, the spirit of philanthropy and generosity is very much alive and well in Barbados. Recently, on Saturday, we were invited to Orange Hill to receive a plot of land from a gentleman who was resident overseas, but nevertheless thought it generous enough to donate a piece of property to the Government.

A house is already on the property and plans are to convert it to a community centre at Orange Hill. At the back of the property, as the Honourable Minister of Housing, who accompanied us as observer said, the owner volunteered to have those plots of land placed at the disposal of Government. It is this kind of generosity that should be applauded in Barbados.

Sir, there is an incumbent Honourable Member for that Constituency and I am wondering why the generous donor did not approach him. He probably canvassed the area and would have realised it would have fallen on hollow ground. Therefore, he turned his attention to the correct authority to make the donation.

2.30 p.m.

Sir, through my good office, as the Minister for Community Development and Culture, in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing, we will be converting that generous donation to something useful for the people of Orange Hill and the surrounding areas. This is something really that the incumbent Member should have done during his tenure, as a Minister, or as an official in the governing Party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, my contribution would be brief. If this particular amendment is going to impact in a positive way on my constituents and, by extension, Barbados on the whole, it will have my unswerving support. Therefore, against that background, it has my support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Asides.

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

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. I want to enter this debate very briefly, not to delay the work of the House. I really believe that there were some statements made that are in need of correction. I had to get the relevant information before I speak to the issues of housing raised by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas who, unfortunately, is not in her seat at this time. I am sure that she would be listening to the corrections.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think if we are fair in our commentary about what is happening in Barbados, we will all admit that we have a major problem with housing in Barbados. There is no Member of this Parliament who can say that he or she has not, over the course of their Parliamentary life and, certainly, within the last few years, experienced a crush in terms of the numbers of individuals seeking them out for housing solutions, or assistance with housing solutions to treat what has become, in my view, a chronic social issue in Barbados. In fact, I would go as far as to say that it is the biggest social challenge that we have in Barbados right now.

Sir, when the Democratic Labour Party Government came to office in January, we were in no doubt that one of our major tasks had to be addressing the issue of how to house Barbadians. I see it on a weekly basis, either in my meetings at the Urban Development Commission or in my Constituency clinic, where individuals come to me, as I am sure they go to other Members of Parliament, asking and literally begging for assistance with houses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we open our arms in a bipartisan gesture to the Opposition to work with us, trying to solve this problem and bring down the backlog. We speak about the 17 000, 18 000 or 20 000 people who are on the waiting list at the National Housing Corporation, waiting to get a rental unit, not to mention the 10 000 or 15 000 others who would like a low-income house to purchase.

I heard Honourable Members on the Other Side making the point about mortgage finance, and how many mortgages we have disbursed. If they want congratulations for that, we congratulate them for doing the mortgage finance, the 100 per cent mortgages, but understanding the reality of what we face in Barbados today, you have only just scratched the surface.

In 14 years of Government, you cannot escape the reality that you dropped the ball in relation to housing in Barbados. This is not to be partisan. This is not to pour cold water on whatever else you would have made, or have not made. This is not to pooh-pooh the Lady Bird house and the Bumble Bee house.

The reality is that if you look at the list of persons who may qualify for some of the houses that the Honourable Member for St. Philip North is constructing, say in Marchfield - I just pulled one out of the hat - I do not know how many they are, but it could run into thousands. Therefore, we have to face this reality.

For example, every week in my Constituency Office, I see persons who turn up with a letter from a magistrate or a landlord, giving them notice to move out of a place. They have nowhere to go or nobody to call. In fact, there are

some instances in which family members are asking their own siblings to leave their houses, mothers asking daughters to leave, fathers asking sons to leave, brothers asking sisters to leave. This is the bad situation that we have in Barbados and we have to face up to it. Sir, that is why the Democratic Labour Party Government is so aggressive in its housing programme.

Sir, we had a situation in Barbados in which they put together two commissions, the Rural Development Commission and the Urban Development Commission. I heard the Honourable Member for St. Thomas make the point that last year, the Rural Development Commission did no work.

I believe the Honourable Prime Minister responded to it and indicated that he got five houses done in his Constituency. I had to get up on a point of order, in relation to that speech. I did not bother pursuing it because I would have the opportunity to speak myself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I came to this Parliament with a Supplementary in the dying days of Parliament last year. I believe it was either the last Sitting or the penultimate Sitting, in which we sought more than \$7 million to replenish the accounts of the Rural Development Commission, which I might add that, in addition to its Approved Estimates for 2007-2008, it was given an additional \$9 million by the Minister of Finance in December, 2007.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: It worked for some people but did not work for others.

We had to go back. This was my first weeks of Minister responsible for Rural. I had to come in this Honourable House to ask for money. One of the items in that document which came before this Honourable House was to replenish the Capital Works Accounts, the Roads Account of Urban, because the Urban Development Commission, under the direction of the previous Board of the last Administration, took money out of the Roads Programme to support a housing programme. Why? Because the resources provided previously for housing, to repair houses and replace houses for persons living in poverty, were stopped by the Minister of Finance. It is all in the documents laid in the Honourable House in the Supplementary. Go and read the documents.

I want to go back here, Sir, the replenishment of the Capital Roads Programme Account. This is in the Supplementary for the Rural Development Commission 2008/2009, as laid in this Honourable House.

2:40:14

It says in the programme document that in order to complete those housing projects, which were started in previous years, and to finance those houses already completed in the current financial year, \$5.7 million was transferred from the Capital Roads Programme Account.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the transfer of funds from the Capital Account is not a new practice, but must be avoided in the future. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you could bet that I put a stop to that because it should not happen, because you then have a Minister having to come back here to clean up that mess.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to get up in here and say that no houses were built...

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: The pressure on the staff at the Commission meant that they had to find a way to deal with those issues. It says here that currently there is an urgent need to replenish these funds. Sir, they transferred one problem into another. They solved one problem by taking money out of the Capital Account for the roads to build houses, and then stalled the road programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is why one can go all over the country and see tenantry roads that were started by the Rural Development Commission that have not been completed. You can go in South District in the Constituency of St. George South, or up in St. Andrew, and see some of them without any paving on them. They are just there with the marl washing away in the rain. This Government had to come to this Parliament and get resources to clean up that. These are things that have been hanging around for two and three years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can give lie to a lot of the misinformation because I have some notes on the work that was done up until December 31, 2008 by the Rural Development Commission.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, my notes say very clearly; housing programme, poverty alleviation = In Christ Church West, six houses and in St. Andrew 27 housing solutions.

Dr. W. F. DUGUID: On a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. No six houses were done last year by the Rural Development Commission in Christ Church West. If the Honourable Member can go and point out the six houses, I would give way.

Further, the Honourable Member said it is his notes. Well his notes are wrong because I am telling you and this House that no six houses were done by the Rural Development Commission in Christ Church West, so the Honourable Member is misleading the House.

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

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: In St. George North, 32 housing solutions.

Dr. W. F. DUGUID: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am asking for a ruling. I am the Member of Parliament for Christ Church West. I know my Constituency well.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Christ Church West, on what authority do you rise?

Dr. W. F. DUGUID: On a point of order, Sir. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Honourable Member got up and said quite clearly that he is speaking from his notes and that six houses were done by the Rural Development Commission in Christ Church West. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying that is not so. It is misleading this Honourable House and it is obvious that his notes are wrong.

If the Honourable Member could name or point out the districts, I would give way. Mr. Deputy Speaker, no six houses were done by the Rural Development Commission in Christ Church West, and I am asking for your ruling.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Christ Church West, clearly the Honourable Member is saying that what he is saying is from his notes. You have raised that point of order. Could you please allow the Honourable Member to continue with his speech?

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, housing solutions in St. Andrew - 27, at a total of \$317 000, new houses - 5; house repairs - 3; bathroom facilities - 2; septic tanks or wells - 12.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not write this myself.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: In St. George North - 32, at a cost of \$457 507. I know the Honourable Member for St. James North is waiting in anticipation. In St. James North - 29 solutions at a cost of \$327 516. St. Joseph - 26, - two new houses.

Dr. W. F. DUGUID: On a point of order. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member continues to mislead the House. The Honourable Member just said quite

clearly that 29 housing solutions were done in St. James North at a cost of \$300 000. That would mean that a housing solution was \$10 000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know which Barbados he is living in, but I cannot see how 29 housing solutions could be done at a cost of \$300 000 because that would mean that each housing solution was \$10 000. Sir, could the Honourable Member please explain to us exactly what he is speaking about because he is misleading the House again?

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

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I understand the agitation of the other part of the House because the reality is that even in spite of the fact that the Government has changed, the Democratic Labour Party in its fairness, equity and decency, has been doing work in their constituencies, which is more than could be said for them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, ask them how many houses were done in St. John in 14 years? Ask them how many were done in St. Lucy in 14 years?

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the record must speak for itself. The Honourable Member is doing better in some instances with the Democratic Labour Party in Government than when his Party was in Government because there were some Members of his Party who could not get things done, who used to come in here and lament, complain and cry. Somebody said that their Constituency was treated like an outside child.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Let me go to St. Peter. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot find St. Peter on the list.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: It seems as though so many things were done in St. Peter, I cannot find the information.

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I go to St. Peter let me tell you...In fact, probably, I should not tell you how much work was done in St. Michael East, but the Honourable Members have largely been the beneficiaries of fairness and equity of this Government. Therefore, for Honourable Members to give this Honourable House the impression that we have wasted an entire year at the Rural Development Commission doing absolutely nothing, when

their constituencies were being served and served very well...

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in St. Peter, there were 36 housing solutions done, in the sum of \$452 145, yet we are going to be given this impression. There were three new houses, six repaired, seven wells dug, eight bathroom facilities done.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we provided a solution. If a roof is leaking and we repaired that roof, that is a solution. I did not say 36 new houses were built. I said 36 housing solutions were done.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Honourable Member is saying he does not appreciate the work we did on behalf of his constituents and that he wants us to re-balance...

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Honourable Member is saying that he does not appreciate the work we did in Christ Church West, he should say so.

Dr. W. F. DUGUID: On a point of order. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading this Honourable House. Sir, no work was done in Christ Church West and therefore I have nothing to appreciate.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Christ Church West, you continue to rise on a point of order, to continue to repeat the same point of order. Please desist from doing that.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this document lists the number of loans disbursed in the following ways:

(a) Six loans were disbursed for the Constituency of St. Peter, totalling \$104 000;

(b) Six loans were disbursed for the Constituency of St. James North, totalling \$52 800.

This is up to October 31, 2008, so it could be higher at the end of the year.

(c) Nine loans were disbursed for the Constituency of St. Thomas, totalling \$115 000;

(d) Seven loans were disbursed for the Constituency of St. George North, total \$54 000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, how could the Opposition say we have not done anything, when we have distributed 105 loans at \$1.1 million in 10 months? Sir, the Honourable Member gets in here and gives the impression that absolutely nothing has happened in 2008.

Asides.

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we understand the predicament of the Honourable Members on the Other Side. Sir, having themselves created such a conundrum of confusion that they could not get squared, that they could not get a handle on, we have now had to come into this Honourable House and bring some sanity to what is happening. Sir, there will be fairness and distribution. You will get work and our constituencies will get work too, but it has to be done on a basis of equity and fairness. Sir, that is what this Democratic Labour Party is promising the people of Barbados and has begun to do so by these statistics.

Sir, when we come to this Honourable House and speak about Housing Every Last Person, which the Honourable Member for St. Philip North can speak to more eloquently than I can, when we speak to removing the VAT on building materials to ease people, when we talk about transferring housing units, we get this talk about transferring the housing unit programme...

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will leave that to the Honourable Member for St. Philip North to deal with because I heard a former Opposition Member on the radio parading about his concern about the future claims of these persons, how they are going to get insurance and separation of units, about firewalls and about future generations, all of these things. Sir, when the Barbados Labour Party was selling the people the unit, you did not hear a word about anything so. You did not hear a word about the Condominium Act. Apparently, the Condominium Act like it has just fallen on certain persons who now know there was a Condominium Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were convenient arguments in relation to the common services only because the Honourable Members want to oppose a programme that is progressive. Sir, I know what happens in that particular institution. I know persons become consumed with this ultra conservative view that they are to lord down on people.

Sir, I know when the former Honourable Member for St. Michael North West was a member of the Democratic Labour Party, he was big on transferring units to people free of cost. That was his mantra, and as soon as

he landed in the Barbados Labour Party, he said they should sell them and that people were getting a good price for them. Sir, when people go into that institution, it is like a vortex. It sucks you into an empty chasm and even the good ideas that you had would be abandoned in favour of other things.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Barbados Labour Party was in Government, they were selling the units to the people. Now we are the Government, they want to harass us to give back money that was already put into the Corporation and utilised. Sir, now we are to be the bad boys and bad girls in town, because we are depriving somebody of something.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do not care whatever we do to assist the people of Barbados, they now want to harass us. They poohed-poohed the free bus rides. They poohed-poohed the housing programme. The Honourable Member for St. Philip North proceeded with his programme with a determined eloquence that evaded the last Minister of Housing and Lands. They say he was carrying away the Barbados Labour Party's ideas and implementing the Barbados Labour Party Manifesto.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at every turn, anything this Government comes up with, we either stole from them or they try to pooh-pooh it as some kind of ridiculous thing, but the people of Barbados have kept faith with us so far and we will keep faith with them. We will implement our Manifesto promises as was told to the public, even within the difficult conditions within which we have to operate in this very challenging global and regional economic environment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what separates us on this issue. I do not issue advice to the Opposition but, if I could, I would tell them to learn something from the Republicans. While the Republicans were trying to gridlock President Obama's Stimulus Bill, his approval ratings were skyrocketing and theirs were declining. When you see a good programme, if it is too much, bite your bottom lip. Do like the Honourable Member for St. James North and declare your uneasiness with partisan competitive politics and state your position; or worse, keep silent and let the action go on. View from the gallery.

3.00 p.m.

Let the action go on; See what good policy social intervention is about. See what proper people-governed Government is and let us build Barbados to the benefit of all Barbadians. Sir, that is all we ask of you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I have said, I do not proffer to advise the Opposition on what they should or should not do but, Sir, I know to do less, they do it at their peril. Mr.

Deputy Speaker, Sir, we will continue to work on behalf of the good people of Barbados so long as we have good health, strength and the resources are available.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am obliged to you.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER left the Chair and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair.

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

Hon. M.A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, it is now my duty to wrap up this debate. First I want to state at the open that the previous Administration on housing policy is best described in a report called the "Special Audit Report on the Urban Development Commission and the Rural Development Commission, July 2006" at paragraph 1.14, page 8. Sir, this is what was said in a nutshell:

"The Commission conceded that it erred in allowing persons to remain on its Register of Contractors, including those persons who only claimed to being a contractor, in that they were unemployed, unemployable, homeless vagrants of Bridgetown, criminal deportees and those who frequented Parliament's yard."

Mr. Speaker, that sums up the housing policy of the former Administration. Sir, not only that but, in the same Report, houses went missing and money was taken from the Housing Repair Fund to build snackettes, and houses disappeared like Winston Hall. Sir, this is the setup, the sum total of the Barbados Labour Party Administration.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the Opposition. We have heard remarks from the Honourable Member for Christ Church West, St. Thomas and St. James North. Sir, the Honourable Member for St. George North fumbled through his speech. In fact, I did not record anything that he said.

Let me say that the Honourable Member for Christ Church West and the Honourable Member for St. James North are not singing the same tune in relation to this Bill. I must say that the only thing consistent about the Opposition is their inconsistencies. Sir, that is the only thing consistent about them. The Honourable Member for St. Thomas had the audacity and the temerity to journey to the Manifesto but, Sir, I could go to their 1994 Manifesto. Sir, in 1994, the Barbados Labour Party promised the following:

"On assuming office, we will introduce a form of compulsory home insurance in which Government takes responsibility for the aged and infirmed."

Sir, nothing such was done.

Mr. Speaker, from 1994 they had it in their Manifesto. Sir, I really do not want to go any further because the Honourable Member for St. Thomas kept wandering all over and then she came right into the lap of the Government and started to question the performance of the housing programme of this Administration.

Sir, I just want to remind this House that on September 4, 2004, the former Administration came to the public and launched... (There was no quorum. The bell was rung).

Mr. SPEAKER: Mr. Clerk, do we now have a quorum? The Honourable Member for St. Philip North.

Hon. M.A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, I also want to say that their own housing policy was criticised by their own members. I do recall the Honourable Member for St. George South said he did not receive a single house spot in the 14 years as Representative for St. George South from the then Administration.

We had the Honourable Member for Christ Church West Central, the former Member criticising the Administration for starving him because he wanted house spots for his constituents and so, the then Administration turned a blind eye to him.

The former Honourable Member for St. Michael East criticised them too for not fulfilling his Constituency needs in terms of housing. Budget

Mr. Speaker, they had their fair share. Their own members criticised them for their lack of vision in their housing policy. I want to congratulate the Honourable Member for St. James North, the former school teacher because he gave a very responsible speech. He realised that this measure is one that touches and concerns the working-class of this country, unlike the others who got involved in the debate on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Speaker, I was mentioning to you earlier that the former Administration in their policy of attempting to touch and concern that cadre of persons, the low-income group, launched a programme on September 4, 2004 and, Sir, I will repeat it again.

Mr. Speaker, they launched the Primary Homes Programme and they sent out messages to thousands of Barbadians telling them to come and get a piece of the cheapest land and the cheapest house. Sir, they said that the house could be built in seven days. There was a show house in the yard of the National Housing Corporation and people went there, up and down in the rain and sun to look at this house. They also said that the houses were going to be delivered at a fast pace.

Mr. Speaker, there were a lot of fancy names like the Sparrow House, the Dove House, the Butterfly House, the Grasshopper House, and the Pea Chink House and, Sir, to this day, if I may read from my notes...

Asides.

Hon. M.A. LASHLEY: None are called the Pea Chink House? I thought one was called the Pea Chink house...

3.10 p.m.

Sir, I read from my notes: Draxhall Hope - one house; Coverley, Christ Church - one house; I do not know if it is "Bumble Bee" or "Black Bird" house; Tichbourne - one house, Carters Gap - one house, Culloden Road - one house; Walkers Spring, St. Thomas - one house; Pie Corner, St. Lucy - one house; Lodge Road, Christ Church - one house; Airlie Heights - 16 houses. Sir, this is from 2004 to 2007. That is their Primary Homes Programme.

Asides.

Hon. M.A. LASHLEY: Let us go to St. Philip. The Honourable Member for St. Philip South and the Honourable Member for St. John, the Honourable Prime Minister, would support me on this.

Sir, between the period 1986 to 1994 the terraced units were built by the Democratic Labour Party in St. Philip. After that, houses were built at Six Roads by the then Minister of Housing, the late Harold Blackman. When we look at the performance between 1994 to 2007, they built 10 houses in Marchfield, St. Philip. Sir, that is when I had to come to Parliament to vest the title with the National Housing Corporation to ensure the conveying of the properties to the owners. They were barred from being absolute owners for a number of years by the former Administration.

Sir, they had four Ministers of Housing, but every time I walk through the National Housing Corporation I am bombarded. In fact, some of the employees say that they have never seen so much work being done at the National Housing Corporation for this period of time. Even Form 1 Notices to be signed by the Minister, under the Tenancies Act, piled up to be signed by the Minister.

Sir, do you know what a senior employee said to me? "Mr. Minister, you look strange signing those Form 1 Notices. I have never seen a Minister sign any of those Notices, Sir, since I was at the National Housing Corporation." This is what happens at the National Housing Corporation.

Sir, when the Honourable Member for St. Thomas could go down that line, the Honourable Member is respectfully going down the wrong line. I could even go to Lower Burney. Imagine that an administration could offer to low income Barbadians land that the Ministry of the Environment had concerns about, and even stated in a document that the land at Lower Burney was a former dump site.

Sir, we came to Parliament with an initiative and a mission to assist poor working-class Barbadians, but the Honourable Members on the Other Side "poohed-poohed" this. Not only that the then Administration instructed the National Housing Corporation to notify those poor Barbadians that they are now buying the land at their own risk. That is what the then Administration said.

Asides.

Hon. M.A. LASHLEY: Sir, they get up and talk about the Joint Venture Programme and how they had a successful Joint Venture Programme. I can only refer to Bulkeley Meadows. Sir, Bulkeley Meadows was launched in 2002 by the then Administration. To this day we have Barbadians paying back for houses that have not yet been built. People have taken out mortgages expecting to get a house, and this is supposed to be their major plank for housing solutions and the Honourable Member for St. Thomas is up and down in her seat this morning, dancing about like a "Mother Sally".

Sir, I am amazed. The National Housing Corporation now has to do remedial work, because bad work was done. They also speak about Coverley, another problem. People have paid contractors and cannot get a house. When we look further at the other Joint Venture Programme, the same problem existed.

If a government had due notice of entering contracts in Joint Venture Programmes with contractors that never built a dog pen yet, but still placing the Crown's land into their hands - It was done at Bulkeley Meadows, Coverley and Lower Burney, where a contract was given to a dance group to build houses. Sir, they have no moral authority to get up in here and speak about housing.

The Honourable Member for St. Thomas mentioned that they built terraced units at Passage Gardens and London Bourne Towers in 14 years. In one year we have started two towers at Country Park and awarded a contract to build an addition in one year. In 14 years they could talk about Passage Gardens and London Bourne Towers. Sir, it is amazing.

Sir, I did not want to touch on the units but I listened to the programme, and heard somebody that professed to be a lawyer talking about the Condominium Act. It was only

on Friday the same person called and asked me for a law book, not to read though. In fact, I cited the cases out of my head, including every decision. I told him to go and look for this particular decision. He asked me where to look for it. I said, there is a Law Library. I am not going to send you at Cave Shepherd.

Asides.

Hon. M.A. LASHLEY: We have people paying mortgages. I can talk, but it is the former Administration, over there, on Sunday night polluting the atmosphere with verbal noises, about this Government offering units for sale and speaking about the Condominiums Act. Before it was diesel, now it is a deposit.

Sir, we have come to Parliament and Government recognising that our philosophy is to create a just society.

3.20 p.m.

We believe that if you lived in the unit for more than 20 years and you are not in arrears, you then have a right to own that unit and to pay minimum legal fees.

Sir, when I was in private practice, I remember doing conveyances, not a lot, because the former Administration actually asked, and requested, and demanded, through their policy and the people paid in a deposit but, in some instances, could not provide the title. They had Town Planning issues which were not resolved and I now have to resolve them. They did that knowing full well that there was an incumbrance on the title. Some were not even vested, and I now have to vest them. Therefore, I do not understand their argument over there.

Mr. Speaker, somebody was reckless or somebody was just playing the fool, but how can you ask a pensioner, someone with daily expenses who have to pay rent and other bills, to fork out \$15 000 or \$16 000 to purchase a unit that they were living in for more than 40 years? Sir, that is the difference between the two Parties. This is where the philosophical divide lies.

Sir, we have come with a policy to assist the poor, by bringing a realistic proposal so that those at the low income level, those who live in the unit for more than 20 years, can now have access to property, and could now be true owners of their property. Sir, the fact that they have the letters in their hands, we said to them that they do not have to pay any more rent and that is a relief.

Asides.

Hon. M. A. LASHLEY: Therefore, when they walk up and down this country pooh-poohing it, saying that it

does not mean anything, the fact is that there is some relief to persons.

Mr. Speaker, this morning the Honourable Member for St. Thomas talked about the IADB programme and she wants to know if money is going to be used for land. The Honourable Member for St. Thomas was a Member of the Cabinet. The matter would have gone to Cabinet. The Honourable Member should know that there is an affordable housing component of that loan, some US\$12 million, and there is some set aside for land acquisition and infrastructural development, and there is some BDS\$14 million set aside to deal with land acquisitions. Sir, if you are a Member of the Cabinet, you should know this.

Asides.

Hon. M. A. LASHLEY: This is a very serious matter. This involves an international bank. I thought that the Honourable Member for St. Thomas would have possession of the Cabinet Papers and probably the Loan Agreement to read the clauses and would be seized of the knowledge of the components of the Loan Programme. Sir, for someone to get up and make such a "boo-boo" that she hopes this Government does not take any of the money for land, Sir, but the money is set aside for infrastructural development costs, approximately 400 lots over a period of four years. This is part of the programme. Therefore, this morning the Honourable Member for St. Thomas frankly confessed that she does not know what is going on. Sir, I put that aside. I will pass a copy of it to the Honourable Member for St. Thomas. She can probably go home tonight and read it.

Sir, the legislation before this Parliament speaks and lays down certain conditions. One is the condition of a first-time homeowner. In order to qualify to get that refund, it must be evidenced by an evaluation, evidenced by an affidavit and evidenced by a certificate of completion.

Sir, what is wrong with putting relief back into first-time homeowners? The Honourable Member for St. James North mentioned in this House that he understands it would be a gradual phase. Sir, the fact that you are now faced with the challenges, the fact that you are faced with very high land prices, the fact that even the State cannot provide all the solutions, a measure like this would only redound to the benefit of those Barbadians seeking property.

Sir, this amendment is welcomed. This amendment is revolutionary. No wonder the Opposition had no argument against it. What is so wrong with assisting first-time homeowners? What is so wrong with assisting those, particularly in St. Philip, St. John, St. Joseph, St. Michael, St. Thomas, Christ Church, first-time homeowners and young people in owning a piece of this rock? It is our social responsibility to assist those at that level, having the

knowledge that this sector was completely ignored by the former Administration.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you had a National Housing Corporation that was established to provide State housing and to provide those in a certain income bracket with some form of affordable housing. Sir, what is around the neck of the National Housing Corporation is the Barrack Construction fiasco. I am sorry, Sir, that I do not have unlimited time because I have the file here with me.

Sir, I ask myself how many houses could have been built with the millions of dollars which were wasted in that Barrack Construction fiasco? Sir, right now we are counting close to \$90 million of the taxpayers of this country's money.

Mr. Speaker, those 30 000 persons on the National Housing Corporation's waiting list could have benefitted if the recklessness and the negligence was avoided by the former Administration in entering into that fiasco. Sir, we could have built over 2 000 low-income solutions. Sir, that is one of the challenges we have to face. That is now around the neck of the National Housing Corporation, and the former Administration must be condemned for that. The Honourable Member for St. Joseph was a former Chairman of the National Housing Corporation.

Asides.

Hon. M. A. LASHLEY: Mr. Speaker, although we looked at assisting first-time homeowners, there is a category of persons who would not be in a position to own a house or buy a piece of land, and we have to cater to that category of persons. Mr. Speaker, we are currently doing an analysis at the National Housing Corporation on that particular group. We have to accommodate that group.

Mr. Speaker, I would be going shortly to the Social Policy Committee with a rent-to-own policy. Sir, Trinidad has a rent-to-own policy to assist individuals who are unable to finance or service a mortgage. The Trinidadian model allows that group to enter into an agreement for a period of five years with the option to purchase, and at the end of the five years, two-thirds of the rental payment would be applied as a deposit towards the purchase of the property and then the rental tenancy would be converted into a mortgage. The Trinidadian policy goes on to say that if the tenant is still unable to qualify for a mortgage after five years, the option would be extended for a further three years.

Sir, we are looking at that rent-to-own concept because, as I said before, that category or that group would

not be able financially to service a mortgage, buy a piece of land or purchase a house, so we have to cater to that group.

Sir, very shortly I would be going to the Social Policy Committee with a Paper asking Cabinet to accept such a policy, so that we can accommodate that group. Sir, that group is part of the 30 000 on the waiting list at the National Housing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of accommodating that group, we have to look at an infilling programme in the housing estates. The land is already there in the housing estates, particularly in Wildey, Deacons, Rices and Sayes Court. We believe that we could introduce some multi-family solutions in those areas and once Cabinet approves the concept, we can then introduce the rent-to-own policy in the infilling programme of the National Housing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, if this Government can look at these policies in just a year and a couple of months, one would ask what was happening for the last 14 years. Sir, it is our remit to focus and to help that group and all Barbadians. That is why we started the projects at Workhall, Marchfield, Four Hill, Constant and Greens.

Sir, we have done an analysis on the Joint Venture Programme, and the existing structure of the joint-venture programme, I respectfully submit, is not beneficial to the National Housing Corporation, or to those Barbadians who are out there now seeking to own a lot or property.

Mr. Speaker, we intend to revamp the Joint Venture Programme. Sir, there is no way that I could be part of a government that would allow a joint-venture programme to continue with developers who have no track record. Sir, no due diligence was done. Those days are over.

Mr. Speaker, this Government will continue with its programme. They can get night after night and criticise the programme. The point is that at Marchfield and Workhall, the contractors are ready to hand over the houses. Sir, more than 90 per cent of the work is completed in most of the projects.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, Valentine's Day, a lady said to me: "Mr. Lashley, I used to support the Barbados Labour Party but tell me something, where did you now find these houses? Have you imported this land or these houses?" She wanted to know because she said the other Government could not find the housing or land. She said she cannot support the Barbados Labour Party anymore.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister and I, along with officials of the Ministry of Housing and Lands

and the Chief Town Planner went on a tour. We looked at lands where the sites and services are already in. In fact, only yesterday I signed off on two conveyances, one in St. John and another one, which will become part of the \$5 lot programme. Sir, if we could do this in this short space of time...

Mr. Speaker, every time we have a housing debate, all we get from over there is that a book would open up and they would begin telling us that what we are now doing was something they were supposed to do; that they were working on this; that this was on the drawing-board; that efforts are now in place to do this; that it was proposed; that it is hoped that; that we anticipate; that one day coming soon; that we were thinking about this; that in the fullness of time; that if all goes well. Sir, we were hearing all these things.

Mr. Speaker, I could only say that the former Administration really was on the wrong track. They lost their focus. They left the National Housing Corporation in shambles. It is now financially embarrassed and we now have to fight and will continue the programme Housing Every Last Person.

Mr. Speaker, with those remarks I beg to move that this Bill be now 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.

On the motion of Hon. R. D. JONES, seconded by Hon. F. J. STUART, the House resolved itself into Committee on the Bill, Mr. S. A. LASHLEY, Chairman of Committees, in the Chair.

COMMITTEE

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This House is now in Committee.

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Chairman, there was a slight error in the Bill, in Clause (1) the year should be changed to "2009" rather than "2008". Therefore, I beg to move that Clause 1, as amended, stand part.

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

Clauses 2 - 3, were called and passed.

The Schedule was called and passed.

On the motion of Hon. R. D. JONES, 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. R. D. JONES, seconded by Hon. F. J. STUART, the Bill was read a third time, passed and cited as the Value Added Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2009.

ORDER NO. 12 – RESOLUTION TO CONSIDER THE GRANT OF SUMS OF MONEY FOR THE SERVICE OF THIS ISLAND.

Mr. SPEAKER vacated the Chair and Mr. CHAIRMAN assumed the Chair.

On the motion of Hon. R. D. JONES, seconded by Hon. F. J. STUART, the House resolved itself into Committee of Supply. Mr. S. A. LASHLEY, Chairman of Committees, in the Chair.

COMMITTEE

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This House is now in Committee of Supply.

ORDER NO. 12

RESOLUTION TO GRANT THE SUM OF \$6 336 710 FROM THE CONSOLIDATED FUND, AND TO PLACE IT AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE GOVERNMENT TO SUPPLEMENT THE ESTIMATES 2008/2009, AS SHOWN IN THE SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES NO. 18, 2008/2009, WHICH FORM THE SCHEDULE TO THE RESOLUTION AND THAT THE EXPLANATORY NOTES TO HEAD 30 BE AMENDED AS SET OUT TO THE RESOLUTION.

HEAD 19

TREASURY - \$447, 102

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

3.50 p.m.

Hon. D.J.H. THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is any mystery in relation to the Head. I think the Explanatory Note is sufficient. We are talking about the sum of \$7 102 required to reach a short-fall in Mobil Marine Limited, aa supplier of telecommunications equipment. These funds are essentially required to assist in meeting the cost of retrofitting the vehicle used by the Department of Emergency Management.

I beg to move that Head 19 stand part.

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

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

HEAD 28

MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS - \$1 098 935

Hon. F.J. STUART: Mr. Chairman, these sums are being sought by the Ministry of Home Affairs to supplement the grants made in the Estimates 2008/2009. The significant grants being requested relate to a sum of \$290 920, which sum is required for the payment of honoraria to support staff, including one administration officer, two marshals and one investigator, who worked with the Commission of Inquiry into the circumstances that led to the fire at Her Majesty's Prison, Glendairy on March 29, 2005.

Mr. Speaker, also included in that sum is a sum to meet the expenditure incurred for an award ceremony held on November 7, 2008 to recognise all those persons who rendered assistance through the Arch Cot Terrace Recovery Operation on October 2007, the Joe's River Accident of July 29, 2007, and the fire at Glendairy Prisons on March 29, 2005.

Mr. Speaker, I believe I should pause here just to indicate that so far as the issue at Arch Cot is concerned, this incident, it will be recalled, occurred in the month of August, 2007, and the Government of the day commissioned a study by a group of experts made up of engineers, hydrologists and so on to do a kind of investigation into the circumstances that might have led to the cave-in at Arch Cot, and to report to the Government so that any steps which might have needed to be taken, could be taken.

Mr. Speaker, a preliminary report was submitted to the Government around December, 2007, and that report gave preliminary indications to what was the state of affairs at Arch Cot. The report indicated that it was going to be absolutely necessary for certain buildings to be demolished at Arch Cot Terrace and that certain lots, the lots on which these buildings were situate, would have to be acquired by the Government in that question.

The lots in question were Lot 17 and Lot 25. There was also Lot 16 on which was situate a dwelling house which, although not recommended for demolition, it was still advised that Lot should be acquired because under that dwelling house ran what was called a "sink hole", and it was thought it might not be safe for that dwelling house to be inhabited.

Mr. Speaker, it is recalled that after the events at Arch Cot, that students who were attending the St. Paul's Primary School were sent to other primary schools because nobody was certain whether it was safe to be continued to be educated at St. Paul's Primary School. The Report indicated that students could go back to St. Paul's Primary School and, therefore, the Ministry of Education was appropriately informed, and students have resumed their education at St. Paul's Primary School.

Mr. Speaker, the Report on the basis of which those decisions were taken, was a preliminary report, and a final report was promised later. Sir, that final Report did not reach the Government until September, 2008, and after careful study of the report, I convened a meeting of all the relevant agencies to discuss the Report and to plot a way forward for Arch Cot Terrace.

It was while discussing that supposedly final Report and the options put to the Government, one of which was a horribly expensive option, and was fairly readily ruled out, given the circumstances of the present Government and the country's present financial circumstances...

Sir, the other options were discussed by all the agencies of the Government and the experts themselves, and the Government requested the experts to express an opinion as to the preferred option for Arch Cot in all the circumstances which emerged at the meeting.

Sir, it was at that stage that it emerged that the experts themselves could not agree on what was the preferred option, so they asked for a little more time to study the matter while they did other tests in the large Britton's Hill area, and not until Monday last did the experts get back to the Ministry of Home Affairs with what they now say is their final recommendation on what should happen at Arch Cot.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is now in a position, based on this final Report as defined by the experts themselves, to discuss with the Ministry of Public Works and all the relevant agencies, the Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment and the Urban and Rural Development, the way forward for Arch Cot.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment and Urban Development is involved because, at the time of the Arch Cot incident, the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Home was pressed into service to house some people who lived in the area.

4.00 p.m.

They are still being housed at the Senior Citizens' Village and there is a fairly long queue of persons waiting

to get in to the Village who cannot get into occupy it because these residents of Arch Cot are still there.

The Government, of course regrets the delays that have been bedevilled at Arch Cot, but, of course, when one says that one has to say something else. It is wiser to act on the best advice possible in all the circumstances, than to rush into Arch Cot and try to restore the place to normalcy, on the basis of either rejecting advice given, or not getting the best advice, and then the worst happens in the short, medium or long-term.

The Government is now satisfied, based on firm recommendations from the experts, that we can make some meaningful progress at Arch Cot Terrace, to get people's lives restored to a state of normalcy. The dislocation and trauma experienced by people who live in that area is clearly understood. I know that they would have wished that we could just wish all of this away and get back to normalcy as quickly as possible. It has not been as simple as that.

The occurrence at Arch Cot was very rare, and its full scope still baffles even persons with expert knowledge in hydrology, engineering and that kind of thing. Therefore, the Government has had to take a position to be safe rather than to be sorry, therefore, to wait on proper advice to deal with this issue.

Over the next few days I will be meeting with the relevant agencies and people from the area itself, having met with the relevant agencies, to let them know what is the way forward for Arch Cot Terrace, what adjustments they will have to make and how soon they might be able to get normalcy restored to their lives.

I just wanted to make that point for the benefit of all concerned. This sum of \$290 920 is to cover the "Thank You Ceremony" that was held to say thanks to those persons who assisted in those three tragedies to which the country was rendered subject.

The other significant sum in the Supplementary has to do with a sum of \$499 800, which is really the conversion of US\$245 000. This sum results from the fact that the Cabinet approved this contribution of US\$245 000, to certain countries in the Caribbean which were impacted by hurricanes last year, Cuba, Haiti, Turks and Caicos Islands, Jamaica and the Bahamas. The Cabinet decided that it was the humane thing to do, to make some contribution to the relief in the countries just named, therefore, that sum came to US\$245 000 or BDS499 800. Those are the two significant sums in the Supplementary.

Sir, there was the sum of \$17 959 that is also required to make up the difference between \$40 000 that had been voted for the Deputy General Manager of the

National Council on Substance Abuse, and the sum of \$57 995 which is payable to that Deputy General Manager based on the accounting of the Accountant-General. This is supposed to be payable as retirement benefits. That sum of \$57 995 is required for that purpose.

There is a sum of \$25 000 required for the Department of Emergency Management to meet expenditures of that Department - the sum of \$92 100 to be payable to the Fire Officers in the Fire Service as flexibility allowances for services rendered by the Officers of the Barbados Fire Service. Those are the significant sums in the Supplementary.

With those indications therefore, I beg to move that Head 28 stand part.

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

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

Mr. D.D. MARSHALL: Mr. Chairman, there can be no divide with the Government and the Opposition on the matters under this Head. We have to say we support the endeavour of the Government, in presenting awards to those valiant and brave members of the Public Service, and also from the private sector who worked at Arch Cot.

Honourable Members of this Honourable House would recollect that I was on the scene, given my portfolio responsibility at the time, and I am able to attest firsthand to the acts of selflessness and bravery that were exhibited by those fine individuals.

It has to be said, however, that the individuals who have either property interest at Arch Cot, and also those individuals while not having property interest at Arch Cot, would have been resident in one or more of the apartments in the area, and have been affected by it, are still feeling the challenge of dislocation.

I understand and emphasise with the Minister because I was able to see the preliminary reports. The preliminary reports came in while I sat where he now sits as Honourable Attorney-General and Minister of Home Affairs. It was always clear that a further and more detailed study had to be completed.

Sir, it is a source of disappointment, however, to the Opposition that the study, having been completed since September 2008, even now some five months later, the Government is not in a position to give a clear indication as to what is to happen. I understand and appreciate the challenges that the Honourable Attorney-General faces. He is quite right when he said that we have to proceed on the basis of the best information possible. I would be the last

person to suggest that they should move to satisfy the anxiousness of the individuals affected, without taking into account all of the geological issues.

Sir, I would like to submit that whatever the outcome of the Report, that it could hardly be proffered as an excuse by the Government for not moving to provide the individuals who are currently living in the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Centre with housing solutions.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, the individuals who are living in the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Centre, from my recollection - and the Honourable Attorney-General is in a position to correct me, if I am wrong - several of those individuals, if not most of them, were individuals who rented accommodation, I believe, at the Arch Cot premises.

There were two apartment buildings. One apartment building is where a part of it collapsed and then we had to destroy the rest of it for safety reasons, but in situations where those individuals were accommodated elsewhere, the issue of them going back into Arch Cot does not arise. And so, while I understand the challenge that the Government faces, I think that to offer the delay in the consultants finalising their recommendations really is not relevant to the issue of settling those individuals resident in the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Centre. Mr. Chairman, certainly our Administration gave commitments in respect of trying to house those individuals. In some cases, our plan was to have some of them relocated to the National Housing Corporation's units when they became available. Others, who were financially able to handle loans and so on, in some cases, we tried to facilitate purchases of land and mortgages.

The point I am making is that the matter of the geological survey and those recommendations could only reasonably be expected to relate to those individuals who own houses at Arch Cot. Individuals who were renting accommodation, certainly, from many discussions I had with them, I know that they have no interest in going back to Arch Cot to rent any other accommodation. The bottom line though, Sir, is that we need to bring some finality to the situation.

I have had occasion to pass that location from time to time and I almost always would look over to the site. I have to say that there are some concerns which, perhaps, now that the Report is finished, can be addressed. Obviously, there are buildings on the location that, from having been involved and from in my submission, and knowing what I know, we have to deal with.

The Honourable Member who has just sat down had mentioned, I think, the second house going into that road,

which sits in a sink hole. The individual who occupied it, would have been advised that while nobody could tell her that her house would collapse tomorrow, the house was already showing significant signs of cracking, and there is a risk that it could happen at any time.

Sir, I believe that house should be diminished with some haste. Sir, while there is a fence and individuals are ordinarily excluded from the site, there are always curiosity seekers. There is always somebody who is desperate to find a house, who may end up going and sleeping in that house.

I do not know if those concerns have arisen so far, but from my certain recollection, there are one or two properties that clearly have to be demolished. I would urge the Government that, notwithstanding the fact that they are now analysing the Report, steps should be taken to remove those houses from the site. I think, in the interest of public safety, it is a wise thing but also in the interest of allowing the people, who actually own the properties, to come to some reasonable conclusion as to what is to happen to them.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the property, where part of the garage is to the north of the cavern, is clearly not habitable. The only issue that we had a concern about was our ability to collapse it, without causing any threat of further collapse to the area. Therefore, I have faith in the engineers that they are able, hopefully by now, to come up with a solution how that can be done.

Mr. Chairman, I also think that we cannot allow the site to fall into a state of dereliction. It is already showing signs of that happening and, notwithstanding the dangers that will present themselves, notwithstanding the importance of excluding individuals from the site, I believe it is important that those buildings which have to come down, that we take them down.

The individual who owns that long apartment at the front, I do not know what are his long-term plans. I think the Attorney-General is in the enviable position and I say "enviable" intentionally, because it also happens to be his Constituency and, perhaps, it may be difficult for him to approach the issues with the kind of dispassionate approach that might be possible for an individual who is removed from the situation. I say it is an unenviable position because it is your Constituency and you have to act in such a way that your constituents will not feel hard done by.

Mr. Chairman, the long apartment building that is there, as far as I am aware, is empty and it will certainly fall into a state of disrepair. If for safety reasons individuals are not going to be allowed to reoccupy the building, this decision, in all fairness to the owner, should be made.

Certainly, when I was the Attorney-General, there were a few calls made for compensation. I do not want to tell the Government how they should approach matters. They may feel that it is an appropriate case for compensation. They may feel that the Law requires compensation. This is a matter for them to deal with but all I ask is that if we are not going to allow individuals to occupy the buildings, let them know.

Sir, if we are not going to allow the landlord, for safety sake, to rent out the buildings, let us let him know. Sir, if compensation is to be paid, then if Government determines that is the appropriate step to take, then let it be done. Sir, at all cost, I do not think that we should allow a building to just sit there, unused and have the owner in limbo as to what are his economic prospects.

Mr. Chairman, it will be a long time before the tragedy at Arch Cot is forgotten. In fact, it is likely that it will never be removed from the memory of Barbadians. I would like to suggest that at some time when once the Government has settled on how they are going to demolish the houses, I would honestly recommend that we try to landscape it and allow people to go as far as safety will allow, but that we always keep the place looking a certain way.

I think that we should consider a suitable memorial, not simply to those people who lost their lives, but for those Barbadians who demonstrated bravery in those circumstances. I think a memorial is as fitting for the people who have perished, as it is for the individuals who would rarely get an opportunity.

Sir, you know in the life of mankind, individuals have the potential for heroism, but sometimes the circumstances will not arise that they can be heroic. We have Barbadian heroes, and for me there will always be Barbadian heroes, who braved tremendous danger and who really shone during those five or six days.

I would like to ask the Government to consider erecting on that site, a permanent memorial to the families but, also to the Barbadian servicemen, fire officers, police officers, CERO and all the agencies who were involved, so that we can celebrate the finest of Barbadian attributes.

Sir, we will not remove the memory of Arch Cot but I think that a fitting memorial will, certainly, stand forever to remind all of Barbados in the years to come that Barbadians are as capable of the finest traditions and actions of heroism.

Mr. Chairman, in relation to the matter of the contribution to regional Governments, we obviously support this because it is something that has been going on over the years. It is sometimes a little sad that we are not

able to contribute grand amounts. I know full well, sitting in Cabinet and voting, that we will send \$50 000, knowing full well that the devastation in the particular country, would cost more.

The devastation in Cuba last year would run into billions of dollars. The devastation that our neighbours suffered, when we formed the Government, would have run into many millions of dollars.

4.20 p.m.

Sometimes, it was a little saddening that we could only send US\$50 000 here, or US\$40 000 there, but the widow's mite is always still appreciated. Certainly, it was always seen as a regional effort, so it would not have been US\$50 000 from us alone. It would also have been a contribution from Trinidad and Tobago, which might be a little bigger, given their resources. Everybody would pool together and make a contribution to aid our brothers and sisters. Barbados, so far as I know, did not have to be the beneficiary of this kind of assistance.

Mr. Chairman, while we are spared and our resources are not required to be diverted for the purpose of reinstating our country, it is important that we continue this gesture. Having done it over the many years we served in Government, we are pleased that the Government is continuing to render this kind of assistance to our neighbours.

I do not believe that we are rendering this assistance because the day may come when we might be glad for a little contribution from somebody else. I think that we render this assistance out of a sense of true altruistic intent and purpose, so we certainly support this continued measure.

The hurricane season will be upon us very shortly and I would want to take this call that Barbadians start seeing about preparations for the hurricane season even as early as now. Again, I cannot tell the Attorney-General how he should approach his portfolio, but certainly when I sat in that Chair, for me, the business of hurricane preparedness started in January. Sir, it was at that time that we started to draw the agencies together to see where they are. Sir, I have every belief that is going to continue.

Hurricane preparedness for a Government is an awesome task. Mr. Chairman, as I drive around, I still see areas that I would respectfully suggest represent our absence of preparation in some areas. There are some polyclinics, Mr. Chairman, that require the installation of water tanks and generators. These are not new things. I struggled with them over a two-year period. My last recollection is that the water tank at the Warrens Polyclinic

is still lying horizontal on the ground. It is a disappointment that has not yet been sorted out.

Mr. Chairman, just to be clear to Parliament, the idea has always been that if we do suffer a major disruption due to a hurricane, we would need to rely more now than ever on our polyclinics so that people could go and get whatever medical attention they need, either as part of a course of treatment or for a cut or a broken arm, thus removing the need for people to journey into the City.

Sir, we have to anticipate that in a very severe hurricane the electricity might be out. If the electricity is shut down, then the ability of the Barbados Water Authority to pump water would also be affected. Sir, even if they could pump water, our water supply might be compromised due to flooding. It was therefore important to have water tanks installed at those polyclinics that would be called on in a national emergency. Mr. Chairman, I cannot say that this is the state of affairs today, but from a recollection, I remember passing in Warrens on the Highway recently and seeing the water tank still lying flat on its side, and that worries me.

There are also issues in relation to the power generation capacity. The country's supply of vaccines is stored at the Sir Winston Scott Polyclinic. My recollection was that the generator there was not functioning and it had to be repaired and there were challenges. Mr. Chairman, if you do not have a generator that is functioning, then obviously your ability to store vaccines, which require refrigeration, would be compromised.

Mr. Chairman, there are a number of things that I would urge the Attorney-General to bring into his scope. I am taking the liberty, I have no doubt that his advisors would have pointed these things out to him, to let him know that there is an urgent need for us to start the preparation now. Equally, our homeowners need to start their hurricane preparation now, and then the rest is up to God. All we can do is prepare so that we can weather the worse.

With those few comments, Sir, we support the items sought by way of this Supplementary under this Head.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Member for Christ Church South.

Hon. J. D. E. BOYCE: Mr. Chairman, I want to lend my support to the items under the Head raised by the Attorney-General, the Honourable Member for St. Michael South.

I also want to emphasise for the public, especially in respect of the provision of public transport, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport and Works, that

it is obviously coming near to a solution. However, as the Honourable Attorney-General indicated, there is need to be absolutely sure that what we go into is sustainable and does not endanger the public.

Mr. Chairman, we have had a number of enquiries from residents, because they see private vehicles using the road, about when the bus service would be put back in place. Of course, what goes for private vehicles would not necessarily be acceptable as a public provision of service. Mr. Chairman, we as a government would have to be absolutely responsible and cautious in this venture, but I am happy to acknowledge, as the Honourable Attorney-General indicated, that we are closer to a final solution.

In the meantime, Sir, I want to assure the public that I have instructed the management of the Transport Board to probably look at adjusting some of the derivative routes in the area to better serve and to reduce the distances having to be walked by residents in that vicinity.

Sir, with those few comments, and the continued assurances to the public of Barbados from the Government of Barbados, I want to support the Head as put by the Honourable Attorney-General.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central.

Hon. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Chairman, I wish to make some very brief remarks on this Supplementary. I suppose I should start where the Honourable Member who just spoke ended and say that the issue of public transportation has been one of concern to residents in the area. Britton's Cross Road, as you may be aware, Mr. Chairman, actually divides two constituencies, St. Michael South on the right hand side and St. Michael South Central on the left hand side, so the issue of public transportation has certainly been one that I have raised with the Honourable Member recognising, of course, that we want to be careful moving forward.

Mr. Chairman, for years, even before the cave-in, that road had a restriction on it in terms of certain types of vehicles, therefore, under these circumstances, it is much more important that we are careful about what types of vehicles we allow through there.

I am aware that the Transport Board now has a whole range of vehicles as well. Maybe some of the lighter ones can be employed and put on those routes because Britton's Hill is a large densely populated community. In fact, it actually spans three constituencies. It goes into Christ Church West, so we want to make sure we get that matter dealt with.

Having said that, I salute the Attorney-General and Member of Parliament for St. Michael South for the cautious approach he is taking going forward. There are many opinions that have been offered, some solicited and some unsolicited, on the scope of the situation and the way forward.

Mr. Chairman, I would be quite frank and say that some alarmists and irresponsible statements were made. That is just my view. The tragedy was most unfortunate. Sir, to suggest that caves all over the island would start to give way and that we are in danger is just really taking it a little too far.

4.30 p.m.

I think we need to be more careful in our approach. I think the Attorney-General is taking the correct approach. Sir, even the issue of moving in to demolish or to do any non-structural site work, as simple as that may sound, could conceivably trigger another situation. Therefore, I think that in spite of whatever pressures the Honourable Member is receiving from his constituents, the fact he is still putting the national responsibility above all that is to be admired, and I urge him to continue with that approach.

Mr. Chairman, I have no difficulty with a memorial being done for the victims and for those brave souls but, in my humble opinion, the best memorial we could have for those persons who lost their lives, would be to see that we prepare ourselves that it does not happen again. Therefore, to that extent, I would offer one or two views. Sir, for too long the concept of hurricane and disaster preparedness has been similes in Barbados. When we think of a disaster, we think of preparing for a hurricane. Sir, there were three events that occurred to recognise that contribution. One was a fire at Glendairy, the other the unfortunate automobile accident at Joes River, and the collapse of the building at Arch Cot. You may want to toss in the events of November, 2007, the slight earth tremor.

Mr. Chairman, I think the lesson is that no longer can we simply see ourselves as being susceptible to hurricane destruction and so from now on we have got to be prepared for any disaster within reason. The point is that our plans and our contingency arrangements must be so flexible that they could be put in place to deal with whatever situation that may arise. That, I hope, would be the best lesson we could learn from this most unfortunate experience. It would be the best memorial we could offer to the falling souls.

The Department of Emergency Management was established a number of years ago. I remember being one of many members - it was across party lines - who was fairly critical of the old Central Emergency Relief Organisation, in terms of its capacity to respond even to a

little flood. We were very critical of CERO because it seemed to have been starved for resources and it had a heavy reliance on volunteers.

We would hope that now we have a Disaster and Emergency Management Unit, a full department, that it would be properly resourced, not only with financial arrangements but, of course, with the professional staff that could be plugged in to deal with whatever disaster we come up against.

Mr. Chairman, in relation to the contributions to assist those neighbours, both CARICOM and non-CARICOM, who have been impacted by hurricanes earlier, again no one is going to support this. The quantity of US\$245 000 is really quite ...

Mr. CHAIRMAN: No one is going to support it, or no one is going to oppose it?

Hon. R. L. SEALY: Mr. Chairman, no one is going to oppose it. We all support the initiative, but what I want to suggest is to take it further. I do believe that through the relevant regional bodies we need to have a proper fund established, a relief fund, so that Members could contribute to while there is no disaster, so that when there is a disaster the few Member countries that are affected would be able to draw upon that fund.

Let us get the fund managed professionally, not by Bernard Madoff or Allen Stanford, maybe the Caribbean Commercial Bank, or the Caribbean Court of Justice, but we need to have something like that properly and formally put in place, so that when these incidents happen, we would not have States, with a begging bowl, asking for assistance. There is goodwill out there to be drawn upon but, at least, there would be some seed money to start that relief effort. Sir, I think we need to have that formalised.

We are susceptible to a wide range of disasters. Of course, hurricanes come to mind right away but, as I said, not only that, and we would like to deploy relief as fast as possible. This Caribbean Region is the most tourism-dependent Region in the world. We rely heavily on tourism to earn our keeps and even from that point of view a hurricane or earthquake could ruin our economic base very quickly. Therefore, from an economic point, I think we could easily make a case for the proper implementation of such a fund. Sir, I hope that would occur and that regional Governments would see the wisdom of going in that direction.

Mr. Chairman, with those few words, I support the Supplementary and the idea that Government is taking this area of disaster preparedness in a more serious manner. I would want to encourage the Honourable Member for St.

Michael South to continue his good work. Mr. Chairman, I am obliged to you.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Member for St. Michael South.

Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my thanks to all Honourable Members who have contributed to this debate on this Head. Sir, I would want to indicate that while I agree with the Honourable Member for St. Joseph, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, we cannot afford to allow that area to fall into a state of unsightly disrepair.

We are also advised that even the demolitions, which the Honourable Member is recommending, have to be carefully done. Sir, there is good reason why that has not been attempted, as the experts want to be sure when these demolitions are undertaken that they will end up as demolitions and nothing else.

Mr. Chairman, the lands on which these buildings to be demolished are situated, have to be acquired by the Crown. The Minister of Housing and Lands would be coming to Parliament very shortly with the requisite Resolutions for the Government to acquire these lands and thereafter the demolition of these structures would take place.

Mr. Chairman, as I said, the structure on Lot 16, under which the sink hole runs, has not been recommended for demolition but it may very well be that course will have to be pursued as part of the overall plan for the area. I think we are beginning to see some light at the end of the Arch Cot tunnel. As I said, we have the final recommendations in. We got them last Monday, and I should be meeting with all the relevant agencies very shortly to fine-tune arrangements for the way forward at Arch Cot.

I know the technical people at the Ministry of Transport, Works and International Transport have been awaiting word from the Ministry of Home Affairs. In fact, they have attended all the meetings we have had on Arch Cot and since the work is going to have to be done, in large part by that Ministry, they are rearing to go once indications on the way forward are clear.

Mr. Chairman, reference was also made to residents of the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Village. I agree with the Honourable Member for St. Joseph that ordinarily people in those circumstances might not want to go back to Arch Cot.

4.40 p.m.

Sir, what we have done, because we were so advised and we thought it good advice; we have had some

physiological assessment done because, given the rarity of that occurrence, people have been traumatised by the occurrence, memories linger and we have had to hold the hand, as it were, of the persons affected and try to do the best we could in all the circumstances.

Eventually, in the very near future, we will have to decide what becomes of those persons who were renting facilities at Arch Cot and, therefore, do not have any facilities at Arch Cot back to where they could go because they do not own any properties there. Mr. Chairman, decisions would have to be taken on that.

Mr. Chairman, the truth is though, they are at the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Village because when the occurrence happened, there was no emergency housing around to facilitate them and when we came into office, there was no emergency housing around either. I know that in all the meetings we have had, we have involved the Ministry of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment and Urban Development, which has responsibility for the Vauxhall Senior Citizens' Village.

We are aware of the pressures to which that Ministry is subject because of long queues of aged persons who want to get into the Village, but cannot get there, because the space is being taken up by the victims of the Arch Cot tragedy.

Mr. Chairman, we hope to have all these matters resolved very shortly. Sir, as I have said, the Government shares the pain of all the people who suffered at Arch Cot. We deeply appreciate the sense of dislocation and trauma which would have befallen these hapless people. Sir, it was not an event for which anybody could have planned and we have to respond to it sensibly if we are to avoid occurrences of a similar nature in the future and what steps could be taken at this stage to make people's lives more tolerable and more comfortably and the Government will move with haste to take. Mr. Chairman, we have to bear in mind that this was no ordinary occurrence.

Mr. Chairman, so far as the Emergency Management is concerned, I agree with both Honourable Members of St. Joseph and St. Michael South Central that the issue of preparedness for disaster has to assume a fore-frontal position in this country's thinking. The Department of Emergency Management is an under-resourced department. In fact, even the physical conditions under which people in that Department have to work, are not nearly ideal. They really operate from an old warehouse just off Warrens. Sir, ideally, what they need are new facilities from which they could operate and from which they could more creatively and more readily respond to the challenges they have to face from day-to-day. Sir, even having to operate in difficult circumstances, the members of staff of the Department of Emergency Management, I am satisfied,

show an exemplary amount of enthusiasm to their work and an exemplary commitment to the welfare of this nation.

I hope that as soon as economic stringencies become a little more relaxed, that we could take a serious look at proper housing for that Department, and more effectively resourcing it for the challenges which departments of that kind have to face.

Mr. Chairman, with those words, I beg to move that Head 28 stands part.

Hon. R.D. BOYCE: I beg to second that.

The question that Head 28 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

HEAD 30

ATTORNEY-GENERAL - \$ 2 387 607.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Member for St. Michael South.

Hon. F.J. STUART: Mr. Chairman, these sums are required to cover a number of issues under the Office of the Attorney-General, but I would just deal with the most significant one. The sum of \$303 500 is required for the Forensic Services Centre and this has to do with the fact that the Ministry of Labour and the Civil Service extended a number of temporary posts to the Office of the Attorney-General for one year with effect from July 1, 2008: A Quality Control Officer; 2 Forensic Scientists, Criminalist 1; 2 Forensic Scientists, Criminalists 2; one Evidence Officer and 2 Forensic Support Officers.

It is estimated that the sum of \$303 500 will be required to pay salaries for these posts for the period July 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009. The sum of \$26 500 is required to supplement the Estimates payable at Account Code 103, National Insurance Contributions. Sir, that sum is required to cover National Insurance liabilities.

Mr. Chairman, the sum of \$200 000 is required under Account Code 207 to cover Utilities. The monthly electricity bills have substantially increased because of the increase in the fuel adjustment rate and the sum of \$200 000 is required to respond to that.

Mr. Chairman, the office of the Attorney-General is situate at Cedar Court. It emerges that since moving to Cedar Court no provision was made in the Estimates for payment of electricity. The Ministry of Housing and Lands has submitted invoices for payment of arrears totalling \$173 552 for electricity for Cedar Court for the period

August, 2006 to May, 2008. The estimated current monthly bill is \$11 500 and the sum of \$115 000 would be required to meet expenditure for the period June, 2008 to March, 2009. Consequently, the sum of \$288 552 is required to supplement the Vote under this Head.

Mr. Chairman, then there are sums required for professional services. The Government has had to meet continuing obligations to lawyers in Canada; Castles, Brock and Blackwell in Canada for representing the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General. This case has been going on for some time. It predated us but these offices are trapped in this case. It relates to the issue of the Kingslands Estates and, at present, the Courts in Canada are wrestling with issues of jurisdiction.

The plaintiffs think the case should be done in Canada but the defendants, including the Prime Minister of Barbados and the Attorney-General, believe that the forum with which the case has its most real and substantial connection is Barbados, and that it should be done here.

Mr. Chairman, a large number of persons have been sued. The plaintiffs, obviously have a very deep pocket and large sums of monies have been paid out in legal costs so far.

4.50 p.m.

The Government has a continuing authority to meet legal bills while this case goes on. There are, from time to time, at the interlocutory stage. As you would understand, costs are awarded to the defendants but these obligations still continue.

Then there are sums due to consultancy fees arising out of an investigation into the circumstances that led to the presence of the Ghanaian and Nigerian visitors to this country recently for the return of whom to their countries, the Government had to undertake substantial costs. So the sum of \$219 950 is required to supplement the Estimates on that Account Code. Then there is the whole issue relating to the Solicitor General's Chambers which are situated at Chelston Park.

Asides.

Hon. F.J. STUART: The Chambers of the Solicitor General are operating under enormous pressure. Honourable Members will recall that those Chambers had to be removed from the Sir Frank Walcott Building, Culloden Road, a few years ago. That is why the Honourable Attorney-General's Chambers are at Cedar Court, and the Solicitor General's Chambers at Chelston Park. Even at Chelston Park, the conditions are cramped and even there environmental issues have surfaced, that

threaten to replicate what happened at the Sir Frank Walcott Building.

The truth is, this country has not had a very distinguished history when it has come to the maintenance of our buildings. Our modern architecture has made provision for sophisticated forms of air conditioning and that kind of thing. These modern trends have not always coincided with what Barbadians are accustomed to, and, of course, with the volume of dust around and so on, a number of people have been contracting illnesses of various kinds.

The unfortunate situation relating to the Solicitor General's Chamber is that because of the difficulties at Chelston Park, the Solicitor General is not able to exercise that level of supervision, nor for that matter, is the Honourable Attorney-General, because some people are still working from home, and in any event, the books which the Department should have at its disposal are in storage. Sir, you would know that a lawyer who does not have access to books is a contradiction in terms, but those are the conditions under which officers at the Solicitor General's Chambers have to work.

I have been in communication with the Ministry of Housing as recently as yesterday, and we are hoping we can find alternative accommodation in the very near future so that the Chief Parliamentary Counsel's Office, The Solicitor General's Chambers and the full staff of the Honourable Attorney-General's Chambers, along with the library and everything else could be housed in one place. If the Government or any Government of Barbados claims to be committed to the maintenance of the rule of law, it is important that Government has a legal department that functions, and that can do justice for the citizens of the country, because when you really get down to it, one of the most, if not the most important relationship in any society is that between the citizens and the State, and if when the interest of the citizen collides with the interest of the State, the State is tardy and justice coming from the State to the citizen is not swift, then the whole concept of the rule of law is thereby undermined. I really hope to get this situation behind us as quickly as possible.

Sir, we had looked at a place owned formerly, I am told, by Ernst & Young, Bay Street, who vacated it, but that is was not going to be able to house everybody and we still would end up at square one, as it were, so, we are doing our best, but as I said, the Ministry of Housing and Lands is in active discussion with the Honourable Attorney General's Office, and we hope to bring this matter under control as soon as possible.

Sir, the sum of \$40 000 is required here because the staff of the Solicitor General's Chambers has been complaining about the air quality in the office. It became

necessary to utilise air purifiers to help improve the air quality, in order to provide a safer and healthier work environment. That is what it is about. Sir, the sum of \$224 715 is required for the Magistrates Court to cover utilities and the sum of \$15 850 to cover insurance.

The Royal Barbados Police Force have relocated their Headquarters to Roebuck Street, in the building formerly occupied by Barclays Bank.

They have relocated with their senior command to offices just off Roebuck Street, in the building formerly occupied by Barclays Bank. The new building has increased space which would make them more comfortable than they were at the Old Barbados National Bank on James Street, but it will result in increased consumption of electricity.

Therefore, the sum of \$129 170 is required to supplement the Vote under Account Code 207, Utilities, for the Royal Barbados Police Force. The sum of \$255 038 is to cover supplies and materials, more particularly equipment and furniture for the Royal Barbados Police Force as well.

There is a sum of \$344 310 required to supplement the Estimates, and this has to do with the payment of what has been described as a contentious water bill, connected with the Drug Squad at Oistins Police Station. The sum of \$344 310 is required to supplement the Vote and to take us to the end of the financial year.

Mr. Chairman, these are the main Heads covered in this Supplementary and I do not think that any of the request can be fairly described as unreasonable. I think there are all justified.

In those circumstances, I am pleased to moved that Head 30 stand part.

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

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

5.00 p.m.

Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Chairman, I should also have indicated to the House that the Explanatory Note to Head 30 is to be amended, as set out in the Schedule to the Resolution, and I so move.

Sir, under Professional Services, the change is to accommodate payment of consultant fees for the investigation into the situation surrounding the Ghanaian and Nigerian visitors to Barbados.

The revised Explanatory Note should read:

“Includes provision for the payment of fees to the Law Reform Committee, preparation of the Barbados Law Reports, payment of fees to Consultants and Lawyers locally and overseas, out-sourcing of Legal and IT Support Services, costs in respect of appeals for the Judiciary Committee of the Privy Council/Caribbean Court of Justice.”

I beg to move that the Revised Explanatory Note be incorporated in the Resolution under Head 30.

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

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

HEAD 50

POST OFFICE - \$227 436

Hon. F. J. STUART: Mr. Chairman, the sum of \$70 206 is required to supplement the Estimates 2008/2009 under Head 50, Post Office.

The construction of the Tamarind Hall Complex in the Constituency of St. Joseph includes a post office. It is thought that this could be completed ahead of schedule, before the end of the financial year. It will be necessary, therefore, to purchase the equipment to outfit the Post Office for business. The sum required for machinery and equipment is \$70 206. Sir, that sum is therefore being asked for in this Supplementary.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, in light of the high rate of exchange in respect of the Euro, the funds provided to purchase the hardware for the electronic postal management system prove to be inadequate and, of course, Honourable Members will be aware that attempts are being made to modernise the Post Office.

I think it is generally known that the Post Office, as we have known it over the years, has to undergo substantial changes because of competition from many other sources as a result of the galloping advance of modern information technology. The way in which the Post Office has done business traditionally cannot continue if it is to remain competitive. There are many other agencies and entities delivering the same services that the traditional Post Office has delivered.

Sir, quite frankly, with the advent of the computer, the Internet and, of course, even the cell phone, which facilitates sending text messages, whereas in the past persons would sit down and write a letter, it is much easier

now to send a text message or e-mail. Therefore, the Post Office cannot continue to function in the old ways.

Sir, it is modernising itself, so it is introducing a new electronic postal management system and the sum originally voted, because of the high exchange rate in respect of the EURO, has proved to be inadequate. Therefore, supplementary funding in the sum of \$167 230 is also required.

Mr. Chairman, with those few words, I beg to move that Head 50 stand part.

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

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

HEAD 52

MINISTRY OF FINANCE, ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND ENERGY - \$33 870

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

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Chairman, this money is simply required for the payment of salaries. Therefore, I beg to move that Head 52 stand part.

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

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

HEAD 60

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL CARE, CONSTITUENCY EMPOWERMENT AND RURAL AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT - \$345 841

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

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Chairman, this is a fairly routine Supplementary. Sir, I do want to speak because the majority of the resources would be going towards the National Disabilities Unit.

I would want to indicate to the public that over the last year, we have had increased requests for assistance to persons with disabilities. We have been working with the Unit to try to see how we can mainstream the way in which we deal with these issues, such as wheelchairs, ramps, having houses retrofitted to be able to make it more comfortable and accessible to persons who have disabilities.

I want to indicate that one of the things which we are doing is that we will, over the next year, starting from April this year, institute what we call, CALCIB, and that stands for the Country Assessment of Living Conditions in Barbados. The CALCIB is expected to assess how people are living in their communities. It is a broad survey tool that is associated with the Caribbean Development Bank's Poverty Assessment Reports for each country.

As you know, Barbados last had such an analysis done by the Inter-American Development Bank, more than 10 years ago, the now controversial Report which indicated that St. John was, in fact, the poorest parish in Barbados, which caused some controversy. The data contained in that particular Report is now significantly dated. I believe that Report was done some time in 1995 and we are many years ahead.

The various social and economic agencies and Ministries in Barbados have been calling for some new data to be brought together so that we can do proper social planning. It has fallen on me, as the Minister of Social Care, to expedite and accelerate that process, working in collaboration with the various social Ministries, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Labour, so that we can have a true picture of the living conditions of Barbadians. For example, those who are living in poverty; those whom we call living in absolute poverty, if we have those in Barbados; those who are living in relative poverty; those whom we categorise as the working poor, to see where they are exactly.

I know the Honourable Member for St. James North, who is not here now in the debate on the National Assistance Board, had asked for the census to be done in Barbados. This is not a full census in that sense, but it is a social census. I think coming out of that, there are many things which we will be doing.

5.10 p.m.

There are a number of things that came out of that Census which we are going to be doing. We are going to be bringing on additional staff in the Ministry. We are going to be working with a private consultant to do the surveying work, and we would also retain the services of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) of the University of the West Indies to do the analysis on the raw data as it is brought in. This is going to be pretty extensive. It will run from April 2009 to March 2010.

Mr. Chairman, our hope is that we can survey close to 5 per cent of the population. There has been some debate whether or not you need to do so much. The statisticians would tell you that for a sample survey, 5 per cent is quite significant.

Mr. Chairman, given the fact that the Caribbean Development Bank is also putting some resources in it and they have been using the 5 per cent threshold in the other surveys they have done across the Region, we would want to follow that model and try to get as much information as possible so that all of our agencies, the National Housing Corporation, the National Assistance Board and the Disabilities Unit, can have real-time data and relevant accurate information on which to plan their activities.

Mr. Chairman, we are now examining a property for the National Disabilities Unit. Our goal, within the next few months, and certainly not too far into the new financial year, is to have the National Disabilities Unit placed in a location that is fully accessible to all persons suffering with disabilities. This is an issue that has been spoken about by both Governments, several Ministers, agencies and Directors. Sir, we are happy that we are bringing this matter to some successful closure.

Mr. Chairman, I want to also indicate that the National Disabilities Unit continues to do its work substantially in relation to working with other agencies. We are going to be looking in the new year at creating protocols with agencies such as the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, we have a fairly high rate of amputations in the country and many of those persons who go into the Hospital for amputations and become persons with disabilities actually leave the Hospital without the National Disabilities Unit knowing what their status is. Sir, they often return to an environment that is very similar to the one they left before they had the amputation.

Sir, the houses they are living in, the conditions and the environs they are made to survive in, are not properly retrofitted to treat to their new status. Therefore, our goal is to ensure that the National Disabilities Unit can be proactive in working with those agencies such as the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the rehabilitative agencies that are responsible for physical therapy and so forth to ensure that when those persons are discharged they can have the relevant tools available to them, that their properties can be retrofitted, that their families can be properly counselled how to treat to the new status of their family members and that equipment can be provided to them. Therefore, this Supplementary would go somewhere in helping us to recover the costs associated with many of the interventions at that Department.

Of course, there is a small bit in there of about \$7 000 that we are going to give to the Council of the Disabled. This is part of the Government's continued commitment to supporting non-governmental organisations in that regard.

Sir, I beg to move that Head 60 stand part.

Hon. P. M. T. TODD: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question that Head 60 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

HEAD 61

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, FOREIGN TRADE AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS \$1 798 856

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

Hon. C. P. SINCKLER: Mr. Chairman, in a previous dispensation, it fell on me to be the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and International Business. As you know, the current Minister sits in the Other Place and therefore it is my responsibility in Parliament to take lead on this matter.

Mr. Chairman, there are a number of things that are here, but I would only speak very briefly to some of them. As you would see, there is a bit of resources in here for the foreign missions. These represent changes both in terms of administration, asset management and property associated with them.

For example, we have shifted offices in New York. We are now in a very functional, very ultra-modern facility at the New York Mission that houses both the Consulate and the Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Those facilities were recently opened by the Honourable Prime Minister when he visited New York for the United Nations General Assembly. Mr. Chairman, I happened to have the honour as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and International Business then to be present.

Mr. Chairman, I want to be magnanimous in congratulating both the previous Government and the previous Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and International Business, the former Honourable Member of the City of Bridgetown, for the foresight in proceeding with that particular work and also the officials of the Ministry, both my former Minister of State and other Members of the Government for concluding that project.

Mr. Chairman, we are now in a property that we can be proud of and that all Barbadians can visit and say this is Barbados' house in New York. We also have in there ultra-modern facilities for video-conferencing. In fact, we have activated that on more than one occasion and it really helped save costs.

The initial cost up front, as you would see as we have here for recovery in the Estimates, might be seen as

relatively large, but when you look at the fact that we can now teleconference on major issues with the staff who every day have to be in the United Nations, and in other agencies representing the interest of the country, we are confident that the cost associated with that will come down and will, in fact, be well worth the effort.

Mr. Chairman, we are one of the few countries in the Caribbean, if not the only one, who actually has this facility available to us in which we can have a meeting in real-time and see people right up front and speak to them just as if they were in the same room with us.

Indeed, we are proposing under our arrangements for diversifying the way in which we communicate with the Diaspora under the new Diaspora Project of the Ministry to expand this work into Toronto, Canada, which is a major centre for us with a number of Barbadians living there. We are also going to do it in Miami and for the Mission at Geneva, as you would see here in the Estimates. Mr. Chairman, that gives us a solid network in which we can bring all of our major overseas Missions on board at the same time with headquarters to be able to communicate and to review.

Sir, as you know, under the recently created Council for Investment Export and Foreign Exchange Earnings and the Diaspora, it has been mandated that the Missions shall have a major meeting once every quarter where all the Missions review their work, and analyse what we are doing on behalf of the country, what is working, what is not, what we can change, what we can teach and so on. In addition to that, we will utilise that space so that Barbadians living overseas can communicate with Barbadians here.

Mr. Chairman, we will open those resources to the private sector who wish to speak with investors from overseas so that they would not have to fly a whole team over when they need to have a meeting, or to do it by telephone only. Sir, they can now come and use the video-conferencing facilities. It is a fantastic piece of equipment. Our hope is that we can link up with the one in Parliament as well because I understand that there is such a facility in the West Wing of Parliament.

Mr. Chairman, you would see here costs provided for two new Missions, one in Brazil and one in China. As you know, it is the stated policy of Government that we would expand the foreign Missions of Barbados. We felt that we needed to have a presence in South America, which is one of the growing areas of the world.

Indeed, since the global economy has gone into its decline, the South American economy seems to be relatively stable. In fact, one of the Central Bank Governors from Latin America made the point that their Region is flushed with money and they are willing to invite

people who want to come on the capital markets to visit them.

5.20 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, both the previous Government and the new Government have agreed that we were expanding into Brazil. We also said we are expanding to the Asian Continent, using China as a base. You will see financing in terms of the establishment of the Mission in China. The roll-out is to be between now and April and we expect to have, for the first time, the former Prime Minister of Barbados, His Excellency Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, to be the first resident Ambassador of Barbados to China.

Indeed, I can say that only yesterday Barbados played host to the Vice-Premier of the State Council of China and that Barbados has signed three Corporation Agreements, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Community Development and Culture, with regard to the Empire Theatre.

Mr. Chairman, the Vice-Premier was glowing in his tributes for the work of Barbados for the deep relations for the People's Republic of China. We stated, for the public record our view and support for the one-China policy. We agreed to cooperate on issues as vast as the global economic crisis, on the Caribbean Development Fund, resources raised for CARICOM for those disadvantaged Regions and sectors. We also sought to reconfirm our commitment to working together in multilateral fora on various issues, including climate change.

Sir, we have a very strong relationship with China. We believe our Chinese Embassy, our Mission in Beijing, will help us to expand into the Asian economies. We are proposing as well, some time in the future, to have a Consulate Office in Hong Kong and from there we would use that as a platform to go into other Asian countries, China, the Asian Tigers, into the emerging economies such as Cambodia and Vietnam. Mr. Chairman, this is a progressive policy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and International Business.

Mr. Chairman, you will see that monies are provided for the establishment of the EPA Implementation Unit. This is something Government had promised. We came in and had to take the EPA up from the last Government and really pilot it through CARICOM. We were successful in carrying that through, but Barbados does not only want to sign an agreement, we want to take advantage of the opportunities in that Agreement. Therefore, we felt that it was necessary to establish a EPA Implementation and Coordination Unit.

Sir, as the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and International Business, I am happy to be speaking on behalf of my colleague, to see that she has so expeditiously brought to this Honourable House, by way of this Supplementary, provision for the establishment of that Unit, which will involve social scientists of all colours, economists, trade specialists, development specialists, et cetera, so that we could pick apart this agreement, work with our private sector and line Ministries to take advantage.

Mr. Chairman, I will also like to take this opportunity to say - and I would not steal her thunder - that very shortly the Minister will have a major announcement to make with regards to visas for Barbadians travelling into the European Continent. I think a lot of people would be very happy to note that we have been able to do some substantial work in that particular area, but I will leave that for the Minister to speak to and to give her glory in that particular regard.

With those few words, I beg to move that this Head stand part.

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

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

On the motion of Hon. R. D. JONES, seconded by Hon. F. J. STUART, 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. R. D. JONES, seconded by Hon. F. J. STUART, the Money Resolution was read a first time, a second time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. R. D. JONES: Mr. Speaker, that concludes Government Business for the day. I, therefore, beg to move that this Honourable House be now adjourned until Tuesday, February 24, 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 24, 2009, at 10.00 a.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative, without division and Mr. SPEAKER adjourned the House accordingly.

5.27 p.m.

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BLACKETT, Hon. S.D. (St. Michael Central)
BOYCE, Hon. J. D. E. (Christ Church South)
BOYCE, Hon. R.D.
CLARKE, Mr. G. A. (St. George North)
DUGUID, Dr. W. F. (Christ Church West)
EASTMOND, Mr. R.C. (St. James North)
FORDE, Miss C. Y. (St. Thomas)

HUTSON, Hon. E. G. (St. James Central)
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LASHLEY, Mr. S. A. (Christ Church West Central)
MARSHALL, Mr. D. D. (St. Joseph)
SEALY, Hon. R. L. (St. Michael South Central)
SINCKLER, Hon. C. P. (St. Michael North West)
STUART, Hon. F. J. (St. Michael South)
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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. 3, speech of Hon. E. G. Hutson.* The words ‘IMPROVING ACCESS TO PROPERTY OWNERSHIP’, the title of a section of the Throne Speech that the Member was quoting, are set in the source as a heading. Printed as in the source.

Q2. *Committee of Supply, Head 19.* The Head is shown as ‘TREASURY - \$447, 102’, but Hon. D. J. H. Thompson speaks of ‘the sum of \$7 102’ for the Department of Emergency Management vehicle. Printed as in the source. Please confirm.

Q3. *Committee of Supply, Head 28.* The seconder of the motion that Head 28 stand part is labelled ‘Hon. R.D. BOYCE’; no Member of that name appears in the PRESENT list (Hon. R. D. Jones and Hon. J. D. E. Boyce are both present). Printed as in the source.

Q4. *PRESENT list and Head 61.* The PRESENT list styles Hon. C. P. Sinckler Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and International Business, but on Head 61 he says he held that office ‘in a previous dispensation’ and that the current Minister sits in the Other Place. Printed as in the source.

Q5. *Committee of Supply, report.* The closing procedural note says the Money Resolution was ‘read a first time, a second time and passed’, without a third reading. Printed as in the source.

DEBATE SUMMARY

(Editorial summary — not part of the record.)

The House of Assembly met on Tuesday, 17th February, 2009 at 10.15 a.m., with His Honour M. A. Carrington, the Speaker, presiding; prayers were led by Rev. Canon Ivan Harewood. The Minutes of 10th February were confirmed and those of 13th February deferred. The Prime Minister, Hon. D. J. H. Thompson, laid the Duties, Taxes and Other Payments (Exemption) Mount Gay Distilleries Limited Order, 2009 and half-yearly reports of the revenue earning departments, and Hon. J. D. E. Boyce laid the Annual Report of the Transport Board 2006/2007. The Income Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2009 and the Bay Street (Vesting) Bill, 2009 were read a first time, and Standing Orders were suspended.

The House resumed the second reading debate on the Value Added Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2009 (Order No. 3), which provides a refund of 7 per cent of the value of a house, up to \$10 500 on a house valued at \$150 000, to first-time homeowners with gross family income not above \$42 000. Hon. E. G. Hutson described the measure as the start of the Throne Speech commitment to remove VAT on building materials for houses up to \$400 000. Hon. P. M. T. Todd said the Opposition should say plainly whether it supported the Bill; Mr. G. A. Clarke replied that nobody on his side opposed it and withdrew the word ‘foolishness’. Miss C. Y. Forde defended the Barbados Labour Party’s record on property ownership from 1994 to 2008 and asked that the US\$30 million IADB loan be used only for the Housing Neighbourhood Fund Project; her speech drew several points of order from Government Members.

Mr. S. A. Lashley set out what he called the failures of the former Administration on mortgages and the National Housing Corporation’s joint-venture leases. Hon. D. J. H. Thompson defended the Minister of Housing’s performance and said that houses were now being built without importing 3S or ANSA McAlpine. After the suspension, with Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair, Mr. R. C. Eastmond spoke of tenants’ titles at the Pine and College Savannah and said his Party had introduced 100 per cent mortgages. Hon. S. D. Blackett explained that \$42 000 a year was \$3 500 a month, after repeated points of order from Dr. W. F. Duguid. Hon. C. P. Sinckler read out Rural Development Commission housing solutions by constituency, among them 27 in St. Andrew at \$317 000 and 36 in St. Peter at \$452 145, which Dr. Duguid disputed for Christ Church West until Mr. Deputy Speaker told him to stop repeating the same point of order.

Winding up, the Minister of Housing and Lands, Hon. M. A. Lashley, criticised the former Administration’s Primary Homes and Joint Venture programmes, citing Bulkeley Meadows and close to \$90 million in the Barrack Construction matter, and announced a rent-to-own policy with infilling at Wildey, Deacons, Rices and Sayes Court for people on the National Housing Corporation’s waiting list of 30 000. The Bill was read a second time without division; in Committee Clause 1 was amended to read ‘2009’, and the Bill passed.

On Order No. 12 the House went into Committee of Supply, Mr. S. A. Lashley in the Chair, on a Resolution to grant \$6 336 710 under Supplementary Estimates No. 18, 2008/2009. Under Head 28, Ministry of Home Affairs (\$1 098 935), the Attorney-General, Hon. F. J. Stuart, explained honoraria for staff of the Commission of Inquiry into the Glendairy Prison fire and an award ceremony, and reported on Arch Cot Terrace, where Lots 16, 17 and 25

were to be acquired. Mr. D. D. Marshall supported the Head and raised hurricane preparedness; Hon. J. D. E. Boyce and Hon. R. L. Sealy also spoke. Mr. Stuart explained electricity at Cedar Court and a disputed water bill of \$344 310 under Head 30, and the Euro exchange rate under Head 50, Post Office. Hon. C. P. Sinckler spoke on

Head 60, National Disabilities Unit and a Country Assessment of Living Conditions, and on Head 61, foreign missions and an EPA Implementation Unit. All Heads were agreed without division, the Resolution was passed, and the House was adjourned until Tuesday, 24th February, 2009 at 10.00 a.m.