
THE

House of Assembly Debates

(UNOFFICIAL REPORT)

PARLIAMENT 2018 – 2022

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, July 20, 2021

Pursuant to the adjournment, the House Assembly met at the Worthing Corporate Centre, Worthing, Christ Church at 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday, July 20, 2021.

PRESENT

His Honour A. E. HOLDER, B.Sc. (Hons), MSW, LL.B. (Hons), L.E.C. (Speaker)

His Honour N. G. H. ROWE, J.P. (Deputy Speaker)

Hon. Miss C. Y. FORDE, J.P., L.C.P. (Minister of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs)

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL, Q.C., LL.B. (Hons.), (Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs)

Mr. T. A. PRESCOD, J. P., B. A.

Hon. K. D. SYMMONDS, B. A., LL.B. (Minister of Energy, Small Business and Entrepreneurship)

Mr. E. G. HINKSON, LL.B (Hons), L.E.C., LL.M

Bishop J. J. S. ATHERLEY, J.P., B.A., B.Sc., PgD. (Leader of the Opposition)

LS-2

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAM, LL.B. (Hons.) (Minister of Home Affairs, Information and Public Affairs)

Hon. Ms. C. S. V. HUSBANDS, B.A., M.Sc. (Hons.) (Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade)

Hon. A. R. FORDE, Rph. (Minister of Environment and National Beautification)

Hon. C. McD. GRIFFITH, B.Sc. (Minister in the Ministry of Water Resources)

Hon. P. R. PHILLIPS (Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security)

Hon. J. A. KING, B.S.S. (Minister in the Prime Minister's Office with Responsibility for Culture and the National Development Commission)

Hon. K. D. M. HUMPHREY B.Sc., M.Sc. M.P.A. (Minister of Maritime Affairs and the Blue Economy)

Hon. R. R. STRAUGHN, B.Sc., M.Sc. (Minister in the Ministry of Finance)

LS-3

Hon. Miss M. K-A. CADDLE, B.A., M.Sc. (Minister in the Ministry of Economic Affairs)

Ms. T. N. S.-A. MOORE, M.B.A.

Prayers were taken by Canon Father Ivan Harewood.

Mr. SPEAKER: The House is now in session.

MINUTES

Mr. SPEAKER: The Minutes of Tuesday, July 6, 2021.

Hon. Miss S. J. O. BRADSHAW: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes of the Honourable the House of Assembly of its meeting of Tuesday, July 6, 2021, which Minutes have been circulated, be taken as read.

Hon. Miss. C. Y. FORDE: I beg to second that.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY HIS HONOUR

THE SPEAKER

Mr. SPEAKER: I wish to acknowledge the presence of the French Non-resident Ambassador to Barbados and resident Ambassador to the Organisation of Caribbean Eastern States (OECS), His Excellency Mr. Jacques-Henry Heuls and the St. Thomas Youth Commissioner, Mr. Tyrell Giles.

I hope that you both will enjoy the proceedings to day and be enthralled by the debate that will ensue as a result of today's Sitting.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, if I may begin the enthrallment, I beg to give notice of the following:

1. Governor-General (Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 2021.
2. Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 2021.
3. Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

FIRST READING OF BILLS

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Governor-General (Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 2021 be read a first time.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAMS: I beg to second that.

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

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 2021 be read a first time.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAMS: I beg to second that.

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

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2021 be read a first time.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAMS: I beg to second that.

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

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAMS: I beg to second that.

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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 4.-

SECOND READING OF THE

DEFENCE (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2021.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, we are proposing this morning to amend the Defence Act of Barbados, CAP 159 of the Laws of Barbados. This Act was passed in 1979 and replaced a very archaic system of rules governing what use to be our Barbados Regiment but which gave way to our Barbados Defence Force (BDF) as we know it today. This institution in its earlier incarnation was governed by something called the Army Act of the United Kingdom and by the Queen's Regulations.

However, in the lead up to 1979 when our Defence Force became a living reality and a matter of much pride for Barbados, a lot of work was done in trying to modernize that institution and to ensure that it was able to maintain the highest traditions of the military, while at the same time accommodating all that Barbados was and is. At the same time, it was to ensure that a proper foundation was laid for an institution that was intended to and in fact did continue to serve us well over the years. Mr. Speaker, it is not a common occasion for matters relating the Defence Force to be debated in this Chamber or even to be addressed in the annual Estimates.

There are some things that by convention we tend not to have much public discourse on but the BDF is something that is seen every day by the average Barbadian in one way or another. In fact, more recently in the early weeks of this current State of Emergency, we prayed in aid the Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.) to help to support the civil structures of Barbados by distributing much needed relief, food and supplies, to many, many thousands of Barbadians, something that was a logistical nightmare, but something that the Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.) officers by their training and by their bent would logically be asked to assist in. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think we would all concede in this Chamber that we saw it as a dry run, in fact, for the kind of thing that a defence force might have to do if Barbados was ever hit in a very significant way by any storm or hurricane. We also see the Barbados Defence Force (R.B.P.F.) operating jointly with the Royal Barbados Police Force in their joint patrols. In fact, every six months the Governor-General renews a special kind of warrant so as to permit the Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.) to work alongside the Royal Barbados Police Force (R.B.P.F.) to support the work of the Royal Barbados Police Force (R.B.P.F.).

We also see the gentle hand of Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.) in our Barbados Cadet Corps has had a fine

tradition of cadets dating back many, many decades. I was not a cadet myself, but I remember standing in awe at Combermere School as the Combermere Cadets, I think it was the Number 3 Company ...

Asides.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: The only Company to have a band and the only company to have produced Chiefs-of-Staff so perhaps Number 3 ...

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, do not be distracted by the asides.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Sir, that fine institution has provided leadership skills to many, many, many Barbadians, and the Barbados Cadet Corps continues to serve Barbados well. Its face has changed, but the Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.) continues to provide an avenue for many, many young people to stay out of trouble, to learn skills, to have the spirit of discipline inculcated in them and also to provide future members for that very organisation.

In more recent times, Mr. Speaker, the Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.) helped to give birth to our Youth Advance Corps (Y.A.C.) so as to provide similar skills to our young men and women who might not normally be inclined to such activity. The institution, Mr. Speaker, has undoubtedly served us well. We enjoy their parades, we enjoy their music and sometimes we even enjoy their hospitality. There were times when people wondered what the benefit of having a defence force was. Does Barbados need an army? What war are we going to fight at any time? We had the famous song "Boots", "Boots, Boots and More Boots".

Mr. Speaker, history I think has demonstrated that that organisation is a solid and worthwhile investment for not an insignificant share of our national resources and it continues to serve us well.

Every institution, Mr. Speaker, has to go through changes, changes in leadership, changes in management, and sometimes one of the challenges of organisations that are so steeped in tradition is that they hold on to those traditions for dear life without recognising the need to change. I am not suggesting that the B.D.F. is high-bound by tradition and does not change, in fact, the B.D.F. has made significant investments in developing resources in cybercrime and modern things. The B.D.F. has the only Hyperbaric Chamber in Barbados, in fact, I believe in the Eastern Caribbean.

Asides.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: There are two in Barbados, but the B.D.F. has one. The B.D.F. has its own hospital and it now has a field hospital that were able to deploy to assist during COVID-19. Mr. Speaker, the B.D.F. has its own ambulance service, its own medical team, and Mr. Speaker, it even has its own jail that from time to time we have had to consider drawing on the facility when we have had challenges otherwise.

Some years ago we spent I think, I do not even remember the figure, but it was many, many millions of dollars equipping the Coast Guard with offshore patrol vessels. I remember we did that towards the end of our last tenure in Government so as to be able to assist in maritime operations, but also in dealing with drug interdiction, helping to keep our fisher folk safe, helping to patrol our territorial waters and to preserve or marine heritage. Many of those individuals in the Coast Guard have gone on to work in marine industries because of the skills that they inculcated.

Mr. Speaker, yes, an organisation of great tradition, first the Barbados Regiment then the Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.). It is an organisation that has served us well, but it is an organisation that is in some respects you could say that it is ahead of the time, but in other respects is a little bit mysterious. It is not commonly known, Mr. Speaker, that the B.D.F. has a peculiar retirement arrangement. Let me set it out so that members of the public will understand the context of this Bill. For officers of the B.D.F., a person at the rank of Colonel or higher must retire at the age of 55, so if I were a Colonel in the B.D.F. I would have been retired by now -- I hope nobody wants to bring those rules into retirement for politicians because half of this Chamber would probably be empty -- and an individual who reaches the age of 50 and they are at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel must retire at the age of 50 and a Major must retire at age 47 and a Captain or a Lower rank must retire at 45, so when you look at the Parade Square on Independence Day all of the ranks of the enlisted men not the officers, you can tell the officers because I think they are the ones who have the sword, but the ones who are sword-less, the enlisted men and women, every single one of them must retire at the age of 45. Now in many respects that has been a good thing because at the age of 45, I believe, they get a cash gratuity and by then they would have amassed a tremendous wealth of skills and those skills then go on to serve Barbados well in other areas and that is a laudable thing, but the truth is this age of compulsory requirement capped at age 55 - and I will say, Mr. Speaker, that there is the possibility for the Chief-of-Staff and I think probably one or two of the other ranks to get an extension, so you could be extended I think by up to another two or three years - but that apart individuals who still have a lot to offer find that they reached a particular point and then they must go.

Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear, we are not changing this specific arrangement, but I did say that the Barbados Defence Force was mysterious so let me pare back the layers and go a little further. When a person reaches retirement age, Mr. Speaker, they can go into the Reserves but a strange thing has been happening in Barbados, individuals have been treated as if they were Reserves when in truth and in fact the law did not allow, so individuals have been accorded certain ranks and privilege and so on post the age of 55 in circumstances where the law simply did not allow for it and at 55 you had to leave the second class of Reserves if you were Reserves and a person of the rank of Colonel could not go into the Reserves. When you reached that age there was no basic or there was no legal opportunity for you to remain within the outer fold of the Barbados Defence Force so as to be able to continue to provide services and it has created a tremendous anomaly, but it goes further, Sir.

One of the finest military officers of this country of the 'University of Waterford', I will not call his name I do not think I am allowed to call his name in the Chamber, became Chief-of-Staff at the age of 59 and served, I believe, until the age of 64. Unfortunately, this was not noticed and in truth and in fact what was a period of great success under that individual's leadership is now in a small way tainted by the fact that in law he could not have been appointed to the Chief-of-Staff. That individual I have had the benefit of being associated with at the Combermere School. He is one of the people who we look up to even now as having been a man among men and a leader for the times, but at the time when he was appointed he was age 59 and under the Barbados Defence Force Act he could not have been appointed because you can only appoint a person to be Chief-of-Staff if you are a member of the Barbados Defence Force, plain and simple, and he stopped being a member of Barbados Defence Force at age 55 so at age 59 when he was appointed to the Chief-of-Staff he was not a member of the Barbados Defence Force so in law he could not have been appointed, so we find it necessary, Mr. Speaker, to do two things or maybe three today. First, we feel that it is vital that we validate the appointment of that extraordinary gentleman to the post of Chief-of-Staff for that period but also that we validate all of those things that he did or that he gave his imprimatur to when he was acting in that post. That individual would have done a host of things, signed off on a whole set of documents and so on when he was in the post of Chief-of-Staff but regrettably, Sir, without any lawful authority so to do so all of those things during that person's period of stellar leadership have to be validated now. That would include things like contracts, appointments that he made, promotions whether temporary or whatever it is, all of those things he did have to be validated, so that is one thing that we are doing.

The second thing that we are doing is to recognise that individuals past the age of 55 have tremendous worth.

Now, this is really a defence debate but it in fact has a larger context because the issue of the retirement age is one that can be a little troublesome. You see it is important for people to retire earlier so as to give the individuals serving in the lower, I do not want to say ranks because this is not an army concept, it is a political concept too, it is a public service concept, it is a concept whether you are working in a factory a minimart or whatever it is... When people move up others are able to rise plain and simple across the entirety of human endeavour from a palace to a church to a school so it is important that people do have an opportunity to move off.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, what we have to recognise is that in a small State like Barbados there is often a deficit in skills and when we force people to move off of the scene at an early age then we have problems. Not long ago - and by not long ago I mean during the period of the last decade, I did not say the "Lost Decade" but you know what I mean - there were a number of senior public servants all across the public service who took early retirement, whatever the reasons were is not the subject of debate today, and that resulting deficit was keenly felt all across the public service and perhaps its effect is still being felt today.

Perhaps, it would be worthwhile pointing out that the importance of allowing people to contribute for a little longer was recognised by the Barbados Labour Party when we were last in Government and it is unfortunate that the actions that we took then were taken very shortly before the 2008 General Election and was left to a subsequent Administration to pursue and not surprisingly they did not.

In 2008, Mr. Speaker, the Defence Board considered a Paper which was put up by the then Chief-of-Staff and that Defence Board accepted the recommendation that all members of the Barbados Defence Force Reserves be allowed to serve until the age of 60, so as far back as 2008 this Barbados Labour Party Administration recognised the importance of giving individuals the opportunity to stay on not in a fulltime capacity, but stay on in the Reserves until the age of 60. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said, not surprisingly the last Administration paid no interest in it, [they] paid no heed to it, and did nothing about it. Mr. Speaker, Sir, years later, (13 years later) we are here looking at the same institution and recognising that, in truth and in fact, we want to do a little bit more than we were prepared to do then, we want to enable all the members of the Barbados Defence Force to go to the age of 65.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a dear lady whose name has slip me, but I believe she was part of the Medical Corp.

Asides.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: I am speaking of her in glowing terms; Major Florence Gittens who has retired from the Barbados Defence Force, and retired again, and retired again, and I am told she is in her 80s. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that wonderful lady still works in extraordinary ways with the Barbados Defence Force, using her special skills. I am sure we saw her at work last year and possibly even this year, during the vaccination programme, and she is in her 80s. Now, I am not asking that we extend the Reserves to the age of 80 but I am making the point that well-past the statutory age of retirement (and this is retirement from substantive posts and also from the Reservist positions) individuals in the Barbados Defence Force remained committed and passionate about staying on and working.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our own Member of Parliament for the City of Bridgetown, as far as the Honourable Member was concerned, the Honourable Member was a Reservist until the age of 60. I am not saying that the Honourable Member for the City of Bridgetown has reached that age. I do not know the age of the Honourable Member. I do not want to know the age of the Honourable Member, but in his mind the Honourable Member either did or would have continued as a Reservist until the age of 60. And if you were to ask anybody in the Barbados Defence Force who had passed their 55th year if they were a member of the Reserves they would say of course, that they are a Reservist until they are 60 year of age. Mr. Speaker, Sir, but the law simply did not facilitate it.

Sir, therefore the second thing that we are here to do is to allow us to benefit from the vastness of the experience of these fine individuals, should they desire, up until the age of 65.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is another thing that we are here to do. Back when that gentleman of whom I spoke about, who took over the reins at the age of 59, it was considered strategically important to the Defence Board at the time, that the leadership of the Barbados Defence Force go in that direction, but they had no lawful authority to do it. I do not know if it was done. I cannot put my head in the thinkers of that time. But as we wade through this exercise, we recognise that we are not giving ourselves the benefit of the best of options as we look at the Barbados Defence Force and so we ask ourselves what if we wanted to do now or at any time in the future what a previous Defence Board felt it was important to do? Unfortunately, the law would not allow us to do it. Therefore, we are here today as task number three to amend the Defence Act by inserting a new clause 169A. It has been tabled. It is on the Order Paper but for the benefit of those who joined us today as the public, I want to read the amendment. I should probably begin by reading Clause 169A.

“Command of Force during the exigencies of service

169A.(1) Notwithstanding section 169 or any enactment to the contrary, the Governor-General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Defence Board, may appoint, where the exigencies of the service so require,

(a) a retired officer of the Barbados Defence Force who held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel or the equivalent Naval or Air Force rank; and

(b) who is over the age of 55 years but has not attained the age of 65 years

in whom the command of the Barbados Defence Force will be vested, and, subject to the terms of his appointment, that officer has command of the Force during the pleasure of the Governor-General.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us break it down. The first thing is that the appointments are made by the Governor General, acting on the advice of the Defence Board. That is what the law is now and that does not change. But we are recognising that there may be special circumstances and so we have the language: “Where the exigencies of the service so require.” So this is not a situation where there is business as usual, the concept of the exigencies of a particular situation requiring is language that is commonly used in law, in statutes and in rules to describe essentially an extraordinary situation where you may have to do something that you would not ordinarily do. So in the ordinary scheme of things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Chief-of-Staff retires and one of the brilliant officers serving below applies, interviews and would be appointed. That is what happens most of the time. It has not happened all of the time, it happens most of the time, but we recognise that from time to time the exigencies (the extraordinary requirements of the Force of the situation of the time) may require that the Defence Board has further options open to it. Now, these options, Sir, are not options from “way out of the blue”. These are not options that would say to let us bring a school teacher and make him Chief-of-Staff. These are not options that would say let us bring somebody from Trinidad and Tobago or Guyana or Jamaica and make him Chief-of-Staff. It is none of those things, this says that you may appoint in those extraordinary circumstances a retired officer of the Barbados Defence Force, so that is the first thing, you may appoint a retired officer of the Barbados Defence Force, so that you cannot be from some external force, you have to be somebody who is a retired officer of the Barbados Defence Force. You must have been immersed in its culture and in its being. But you must also have held a senior rank, so that you must have held a rank not lower than Lieutenant Colonel or the equivalent Naval or Air Force Rank. We do not have an Air Force but my drafters have said that in the interest of completeness they want to include the term. We do not have a Navy but we do have a Coast Guard. We recognise that in the Military there is an equivalency of ranks, though the titles may change.

The actual name may change but if they stood together on a level playing field, they would all have the same rank but, as I said, Sir, the Barbados Defence Force (BDF), the army, is mysterious. You must have held the rank of not lower than Lieutenant Colonel or its equivalent, and given that you are retired you would have to be over the age of 55 but not yet 65. Had this been the law at the time when that other individual was appointed, there would have been no problem. He would have fit this Bill exactly, but it was not the law.

Mr. Speaker, I reiterate: This is not about business as usual. This is not about the run-of-the-mill situation. This is not about the ordinary. Exigencies of the service requiring is a clear indication that there would be something out of the ordinary; extraordinary circumstances where the Defence Board may feel that it needed to have its options open. That is essentially what this is, Sir. Mr. Speaker, we are not removing anything. The Governor General still makes the appointment. She still makes it on the advice of the Defence Board, so those structures are not changing but what we are doing is giving the Defence Board the opportunity to consider at any point in time, in respect of the leadership, a larger category, a larger class of individuals to take the institution forward, Mr. Speaker.

Those are the three things that we are here to do with this Amendment, Sir. Let me repeat them: Firstly, to validate the appointment that took place some years ago where the individual who was appointed could not lawfully have been appointed. Secondly, we are validating all of the actions taken by that individual, and that individual without doubt served the Barbados Defence Force with the greatest of honour.

Asides.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, we are extending the age of retirement of members of the BDF from the reserves; so you still retire at your normal age but you can remain in the reserves until you are the age of 65. You do not have to go at 55 now as the law is. Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, we are empowering the Defence Board with the opportunity to consider a larger class of individuals should the need require and should the exigencies of the situation require the making of an appointment of Chief of Staff.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is not often that this Chamber will have an opportunity to debate the Barbados Defence Force, and that is not what is intended today either. However, I do want to take the opportunity on behalf of the Government and on behalf of the people whom they have served to thank the members of the Barbados Defence Force, those present and those past, for the exemplary and extraordinary service that they have given to the State of Barbados. They have been a beacon to

us. At a lower level they have entertained us with their drill and their precision, but at a higher level they have put their lives on the line to help safeguard Barbados and its values, Sir. Occasionally some of them will receive national honours for bravery -- some of them did last year -- and other commendations, but the vast majority of them will receive no medal. The vast majority of them will receive no accolade other than the praise that we give them from this Place.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, with those words I beg to move that this Bill be read a second time, in its terms but in the context of an organisation that is exemplary in every way, an organisation that pulls its weight and more, and an organisation that is really the backstop for civil society whether it is to help in hurricane relief or whether it is to help in a vast array of things.

Hon. Miss C. Y. FORDE: I beg to second that, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Bishop the Hon. Bishop J. J. S. ATHERLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will endeavour not to be very long. I certainly want to begin by expressing appreciation to the command and the members of the Barbados Defence Force and the Barbados Coast Guard with respect to their recent involvement in happenings of misfortune in Barbados and other parts of the Caribbean. Traditionally we have seen the Barbados Defence Force and the Barbados Coast Guard used in our national efforts to assist our neighbours who have fallen victim to unfortunate circumstances; whether they would have been law and order-related, militarily-related or emanating from impacts of natural disasters. That has happened historically, and the men and women wearing the national colours of Barbados in uniform have done us a tremendous credit in how they have acquitted themselves in these jurisdictions overseas in those instances, Mr. Speaker. They have done the same at home, and recently with the issue we had relative to distribution of care packages, food vouchers, groceries or whatever label you want to put to that exercise, I think to some extent also in the wake of the volcanic ash fall on Barbados, we have seen the Barbados forces at work in lending the kind of service of national community that would have been desired at that time. They worked very hard and energetically and for long hours to get the job done in what was not the best of circumstances and also not having been equipped themselves with a sufficiency of resources.

Sir, I want to begin by appreciating the work of our servicemen and women in that regard. Therefore, I want further to be understood that when I express that we exercise some caution with respect to the use of the BDF on the ground and in civilian exercises in Barbados, this is not an assault on the Government for how they have

handled recent crises. This is not an attack on the BDF in terms of how its men and women have been deployed. I am simply saying that sometimes there can be a very thin line between military duties, functions and roles and providing humanitarian assistance and service in times of crises. If it happens too often by force of circumstance, there is always the danger that it becomes quite an accepted thing; that the actions, functions and presence of the military personnel are so familiarly seen and regularly engaged that it becomes an accepted part-and-parcel of normal life. I do not think that it is, and I do not think that it is intended or even hoped to be. While I commend and credit them for the service they provide to our nation and to other countries about us, I also ask that we be cautious as a Government and as a people in terms of how we manage that sort of intervention by military forces in everyday, civilian matters. Sir, we do not want to cross the line.

We salute the efforts over time, and we are especially appreciative of it now when the Barbados Defence Force is available to supplement the efforts of the Royal Barbados Police Force, a Force which by admission is depleted by some 200 members and possibly depleted in terms of resources that we can rely upon. It is disciplined by that Force under approved circumstances to assist the regular constabulary and I think it is a positive for Barbados, especially in these times when the peace and tranquility of the land would be threatened by those who have ill intentions or not the best interest of others or of the country at heart.

Whatever we do as a people or Government and to address deficiencies or loopholes in the legislation with respect to the management, command and the operation of our military forces, we must try to ensure that it positively in fact serves to bring about such improvement that we seek such improvement that is necessary. We face a big threat in this region. Barbados is not immune or exempted from trans-regional crime, from trafficking in arms and from the drug element operating about us. All of these are clandestine efforts that people pursue in their own interest and their own material advancement, work to the detriment and to the wellbeing of our country. The presence of this phenomenon has not only threatened our wellbeing, a sense of piece of and calm, a social cohesion as a community, making us attractive to the World, but of course it threatened order, social climb that we prefer to which we are accustom, it threatened our developmental gains earned through hard work of many over time, they threatened our very democracy and our system of Government. Mr. Speaker, I am suggesting that whatever we do therefore we have to ensure that it is done towards these ends and that whatever we do is adequate to serve those ends that we make the Force a better entity that can help us to withstand in the face of these threats to our democracy and our development and our social disposition as a jurisdiction and as a people.

I want to urge that we treat to the wellbeing of our service people in a better fashion. I am not going to into a lot of debate and argument today. This is a general call. We have to treat our workers better in Barbados, but we have to treat our service people better, whether it be the Military, Coast Guard, Defence Force or the Police Officers. We have to make sure that our service people in various sectors across this country are treated in a better fashion. That not only applies to remuneration, but it applies to other wholesome considerations. It does not take us long to imagine what people are facing and what people would need and how we can treat to giving them a better sense of wellbeing. I think that we need to make sure in which I have spoken about before with reference to how Police Officers are remunerated in Barbados. I still repeat the call that they need to be better remunerated, but of course there are other considerations as well, and I was not at all encourage by what I saw recently exposed in our media that in terms of disability benefits, insurance coverage for our officers in the Police Force in line of their duty in driving sometimes at urgent and emergent speeds with the police vehicle there is no insurance coverage. I was a bit taken back to see that we are still at that in 2021 if that is true at that place. We have to do a better job in treating to our service people, in the Police Force, Military and in every which way and that does not only apply to remuneration but it applies to other considerations as well. Persons who are brought to a place of disability while serving this country should not be abandoned, neglected or forsaken and certainly should not be forgotten. I urge that these things be treated with some immediacy.

I am a lay person and not a lawyer, but perhaps maybe in the Honourable Attorney General, Member for St. Joseph could address this. I was trying to read in The Defence Act, Cap. 159 and I hope I have in Section 9, where the authority for giving directives to the Defence Force is reposed in the power of the office of the Governor-General. Section 9 also goes on to say that the Governor-General may give directives to the Chief of Staff for operations of the Defence Force and the Prime Minister is also given authority to give directives to the Chief of Staff relative to the operations of the said Force in the absence of directives coming from the Governor-General. I do not know the intention of the drafters of the law at the time. My reading of it as a layman suggest perhaps some potential for conflict or potential for abuse and I really want to hear perhaps that matter treated and a little bit more clarity if not today at some soon time, because as I said as layman it seems to me there is potential for conflict if the authority for commanding or giving directives to the Chief of Command, Chief of Staff in the Barbados Defence Force, if the Governor-General thinks if the Prime Minister has something that he or she would want to see effected through use of the Force then it would be on advice of the Governor-General. However, the legislation as I see it unless I am reading an outdated piece says at Section 9 that

authority is also given to the Prime Minister in the absence of directives from the Governor-General. That would be my contribution for this matter for today Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Christ Church East.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAMS: Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Defence (Amendment) Bill, 2021. Sir, we now are effectively looking at falling in line with what are generally accepted views on older persons in our community. Now, I say that very broadly to bring it to a narrow point. When we think of an army or we cast our minds to think of let us say the Royal Marines, what comes to mind is what is shown in the advertisements, persons jumping out of a helicopter, persons with parachutes, person rappelling down a mountain, people crawling under barb wire and flash bangs going off above their head. When we think of the Navy Seals in the United States, we think of the Navy Seal Team 9 that took out Osama Bin Laden and their preparation on the rigors that they went through. Hence, for most persons, our concept or dominant thoughts when we think of an army, navy, air force or any armed forces are young active exceedingly fit people. Sir, for a long time that was the core function of an Army or a Defence Force. The Defence Force is literally what its name suggest. It is not a force intended to go and start a war or wage a war against someone else. It is a force that is intended to protect the shores and borders of our country from foreign intruders or to preserve peace within our country when such is required.

While we look at the advertisements and we see the people jumping out of the plane and see persons running with these heavy machine guns, what we do not see are the persons in the background who keep it all together. What we do not see are the engineers. What we do not see are the persons who designed the equipment or instruments that an army may use. What we do not see are the persons who do the IT and keep the backend stuff running. What we do not see are the human resources personnel that manage and observe the functions inside of an arm force. Sir, an armed force or an army is effectively like a big corporation. That is what it is. You have the persons at the bottom whose task is to carry out the functions and the orders of the persons above.

You have the management level, the directors, supervisors and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). If you look at the structure of an army, it effectively simply follows any other organizational structure. It differs to how we apply rules. It is different in how rules are followed. It is different in some of the rights of the individuals under the command. For example, there is a rule called Comply and then complain which requires you to carry out your order and then raise your issues about it afterwards. However, the bottom line function is that there is no

mystery to the functioning of a Defence Force. It follows a corporate structure right up to the Chief of Staff who is the effective CEO.

When the retirement age for the Defence Force or other armies was contemplated at the time when we followed the British model, you had to have persons within the force who were capable of active service. If a war broke out, these people could actually go and fight on the frontlines or to do battle. We have moved a long way from that point. Even the advertisements that you now see for the armed forces overseas have now changed. It is not come, train, fight and die for your country. It is come, join the army, have career advancement opportunities and get an education. These are the benefits of it, such as healthcare and pension.

Even what we used once upon a time to attract people to join the armed forces has actually changed as well. The factors which inform the retirement age of 55 years no longer apply to now. Society has moved that retirement ages are being pushed back because we accept that persons can play a more productive role longer into their lives than we initially contemplated. Sir, when I was a teenager growing up I thought 40 years of age was old. As I have passed that barrier, Sir, and pelting way pass it at full speed I now believe that 50 and even 60 years are young.

Actually, I am thinking that 65 years might be the prime. Our perspectives change, Sir. It is true. Once upon a time in Barbados when you got to a certain age and the Bible even say three score and ten, there are many people in Barbados at three score and ten who are not waiting to die but who are looking at the next venture to get into. Sir, I saw with interest a documentary on a lady who was 100 years of age who went to gym every day. She would go to the gym every day being driven by her 96-year-old sister. This only stopped because the 96-year-old sister failed the eye examination. After a certain age, you have to get eyes tested to get your licence renewed.

She could not drive them to the gym anymore, so some grandchild took them. Sir, that 100-year-old lady as part of her regime found herself at the gym each day. Granted she is not prancing all over the place and doing black flips like we saw Simon Biles doing in the US Olympic trials, but she was doing here part to keep herself fit. Quite frankly, Sir, I felt a bit embarrassed and shame. I am sure that some of my other colleagues in here had they watched it would have felt suitably ashamed and embarrassed too because at 100 years old her routine and regime is something that I would probably have to gear up to and practice in quiet before inviting the cameras to see. The point is that this is not now unusual. I determined yesterday that I was going to start exercising and found myself at the Botanical Gardens in the afternoon.

The amount of people that passed me walking, Sir, and I was chipping along, but some people passed me including two ladies who powered passed me. I thought to myself that I could not see my mother doing this at 50 years or my parents doing this at 60 years. I would have never contemplated it. If your grandmother told you that she was going to the gym you would ask her, “Granny, are you going off?” Presently, we accept that as normal because things have changed.

In the US, they are putting laws in place to bring back retired persons to allow them to perform a more useful function in the airports. In Miami International Airport, a decision was made that a certain amount of their workforce had to be above 65 years old, so they took back on people. You see older persons cleaning or wiping down because they still have a useful life. Why do I go all the way there, Sir? What does this have to do with the armed forces? We are only now following what the rest of the world has done already, Sir. In the US army, officers can work up until the age of 62 years. Where you are in a certain sphere, one can defer or re-enlist until 65 years old.

In the UK, regular soldiers can re-contract with the UK army. You can re-join up to when one is 57 years old and serve until 60 years of age. However, service personnel can also continue until 65 years old in specialized areas and over that on a case by case basis. There was a very interesting article in the Daily Mail newspaper published October 19, 2020 where the Secretary of Defence said, “Soldiers are told that they can now serve until they are 65 so that the Defence Chiefs can use and lean on their expert knowledge. Specialists in intelligence gathering, engineering and certain specialist administrative roles will be able to stay on until the normal retirement age of the Civil Service.”

An army source was quoted as saying, “If someone wants to stay and they have a specialist skillset, why would not we want them?” We look at our BDF. I heard the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in his address suggested that we need to be careful about blurring the lines of what the force is supposed to do. I hear him on that point but I also make the other point that Barbados saw the resources of the BDF during the COVID-19 pandemic when Barbados was on lockdown. When we as a Government needed to get assistance to the people of Barbados, sat down as a Cabinet and thought with other stakeholders how can we best do this.

What resources are best available to us? Which group of people are logistically the best suited, equipped and trained to handle what was effectively a mammoth humanitarian undertaking? We went back to the BDF not because of their skills at defense and offensive operations, but because we associate armies with organization, problem solving and management of disaster situations. If

you now have an army or a force that fulfils that requirement, then you have to be able to staff that people who have the competencies to do those things. Sir, experience beats a lot of things. There are things I know now that I am not anymore educated in terms of book knowledge or letters behind my name than I was 25 years ago.

However, I can tell you that life has taught me many things. Life has taught me when to stop. It has taught me when to go. It has taught me how to weigh certain circumstances and listen to that inner voices. Some of those things come only from experience. If you think of a General, your mind goes towards Colin Powell or persons such as Brigadier Lewis. You think of persons with grey hair and a wealth of experience behind them. They came up through a Force, they reached the pinnacle of their respective organisations and they had that institutional knowledge that allowed them to apply that and managed the respective Forces to the best of their ability and to keep them functioning. The other person that the Attorney General referred to is a good friend of the Attorney General and if the Attorney General did not call his name then I will not either, but we all know we are talking about. He was very well respected not just for what he achieved or the credentials behind his name, but by his demeanour, by his experience and by his persona. He looked the part of the soldier and performed the role adequately and well up to age 64. Arguably, Sir, I do not think that his capacity at age 64 was any less than it was at age 50, so while I understand the need for us or while I understand what previously informed the retirement age of 55 within the Army that thought process, those modalities, do not exist now.

Sir, the other thing that we need to perhaps contemplate is: what is our position generally in Barbados with respect to aging? How do we as Barbadians see our ageing population? How do we treat to them? When I was a child I would not even put God so far from my thoughts as to unpick my teeth and talk back to somebody who was older than I. The invisible line and the criteria was anybody of a parent’s age, but I had older parents so it was a little bit lower than that, but the point is you would not dare talk back to somebody that has a child that had grey in their hair in a disrespectful manner. If your teachers at school had reason to discipline you and you went home and complained that your teachers disciplined you, then you would get disciplined again by your parents for having embarrassed them to the point where somebody else had to discipline you. The fact is that we respected age and what it brought. We respected the wisdom of experience.

Asides.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAMS: I would actually tap myself, Sir, only because I was being applauded by

someone I respect significantly, someone who I respect their wisdom, their acumen and their experience.

A rousing round of laughter.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAMS: We laugh, but I also make the point, out of perhaps everyone in the Government the person whose voice most makes me pause in terms of what they say, in terms of when they try to give assistance, is actually the Honourable Member for St. Thomas because she has forgotten things that I have not even learn yet. This is no reflection on her memory or her recall.

Asides.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAMS: I have to be very careful, Sir, with what I consider compliments because you know how it is, but the point is her wealth of experience and her ability to understand situations are things that I now still have to learn in certain respects and I look upon her as an example of the right way to do things. I look upon her as an example of an elder and an elder to be respected. I think that we as a country have drifted a far way and a lot of it has to do in how we respond and respect those who are actually deserving of our respect by what they have done and what they continue to do in Barbados.

Sir, while we debate this amended legislation, while we contemplate what it means for the armed forces, while maybe we might end up having to look at something similar for the Police -- I do not know, I do not want to put thoughts in the Attorney General's head -- but we need to recognise that there is a sector of Barbados that was side-lined for a while, but that still has a valuable contribution to make to the landscape of Barbados and the development of our country and we should not side-line anyone who has a contribution to make and who is competent and in a position to actually make that contribution. We talk about age discrimination, Sir, this is it. The rule that currently applies with respect to the Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.) that we are now seeking to amend is a perfect example of age discrimination in a sector where it is unnecessary and unwarranted.

Sir, just two other things. Let us as well look at the functions the B.D.F. provides in addition to the logistical support. As the Attorney General alluded to, the B.D.F. has a Cyber Intelligence Unit and we are looking at that as being an important functioning department of the Government of Barbados. That is something that young people can aspire to go into, but it is also something that does not effectively have an age requirement on it. There is almost no exertion in doing cyber intelligence and there is no reason that someone at age 50, 60 or even 70, if they are capable and competent, should not be performing that role. Sir, maybe in the future we might even wish to go as far as

England that considers things on a case-by-case basis if there is a specialist skill.

Sir, we all know that a number of persons who have professional skill sets joined the Army in the Reserves as doctors, engineers, lawyers and surveyors and they are accorded a rank commensurate with their contribution to the Army. Sir, those sort of persons as well, based on the service that they provide can do it well past the existing retirement age and this allows us to be able to draw from a larger pool without closing the doors simply on the attainment of a number.

The Attorney General in his presentation spoke about the extension of the retirement age to 65 and while it does not actually appear in the amendment itself, that is because it is going to be the subject of regulations that will follow the passage of this piece of legislation, so though you may not see it in the amendment Bill itself or the Act when it is passed or if it is passed -- having heard no serious objection from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition I would say the Act when it is passed -- although it is not there that is because it will be covered and dealt with in respect to the legislation, so for the ordinary persons if you look it says the Validation Section talks about those who before this came in at age 55 and extended past and validating what they would have done there or those who are already in it, the Regulations will actually extend it so persons who are not yet at age 55 once the Regulations are done are not grandfathered, but they can proceed an extend their length of service to Barbados based on the Regulations to follow.

Sir, having said all of that, I just want to thank the Attorney General for making wrong things right. We have come in line with the rest of the world. I want to thank the Honourable Member for St. Thomas for being the person that she is, as an example, and I might even wrap the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in here too, as an example of the fact that let us keep contributing once we are able to contribute and that age is just a number.

With those few words, Sir, I wish to entirely support this amendment and say that this is in the best interest of Barbados and long may it be so. Thank you.

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

Ms. T. N. S-A. MOORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the previous speakers this morning I would want to start my submission by commending the Barbados Defence Force (B.D.F.) for the way that they have endeavoured at all times to step up to the plate as it were especially when this country needs them most.

Mr. Speaker, my submission this morning to this particular debate takes us a little past the justification that has been presented to the proposed amendments, which by the way, Mr. Speaker...

Mr. SPEAKER: Your microphone needs to be turned on Honourable Member.

Ms. T. N. S-A. MOORE: I wish to draw our...

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you would need to start from the start because Hansard would have missed everything that you would have said.

Ms. T. N. S-A. MOORE: It was just an introduction but I will start over.

Mr. SPEAKER: Yes, but Honourable Member...

Ms. T. N. S-A. MOORE: I just started my submission, Mr. Speaker, by giving commendation to the Barbados Defence Force for the very outstanding work that they have done within our country particularly stepping up to the plate at times when we needed them most. This was expressed by previous Speakers in the most recent care package distribution and so on but in times of crisis in particular and when our Royal Barbados Police Force needs the necessary support the Barbados Defence Force is always there to do a very outstanding job and I would want to commend them.

Mr. Speaker, my brief contribution to this debate really seeks to take us past the justification that we have heard offered by the Honourable Member for St. Joseph for the proposed amendments which have been brought to us this morning. I wish to draw attention in the first instance to the very real concern that the armed forces are under-resourced and struggling to attract and retain officers. This is not only true for the Barbados Defence Force but it is also observed in the Royal Barbados Police Force so the issues of recruitment and succession therefore are issues that come to the fore and raise the reasonable questions surrounding whether there is a recruitment and succession crisis with which we need to be concerned. I use the word crisis and understand very well that many of us are belaboured with the use of that word especially at a time when there are so many crises presenting themselves with which we must be concerned but it seems that the proposed amendments are being suggested at this time to address what may be classified as the perfect storm in the Barbados Defence Force where officers are being allowed to retire at an early age when they are considered to be still mentally and physically able-bodied and having the capacity to serve, and in circumstances where there is a clear resource deficiency one might even use the term understaffing within the armed forces.

Mr. Speaker, we observe similar challenges in terms of recruitment and succession in the Royal Barbados Police Force. Of course, there is also the issue of how opportunity is provided for those within the Royal Barbados Police Force to advance. I say this, Mr. Speaker, because in the Royal Barbados Police Force, for instance, what we see would typically mirror what we would see a lot of in Hollywood, that is, 'nuff' acting. Recently I was at a closing ceremony following a seminar which targeted the executive leadership of the Royal Barbados Police Force and practically each senior of the near 20 people that were being presented with certificates of participation following a two-week seminar was acting, Acting Inspector, Acting Superintendent, Acting Assistant Commissioner, acting acting, acting, and it makes us wonder what we are really doing to not only attract the best but retain the best and to expect that we would get the best from among them, so Sir, I am delighted to hear the Honourable Member for St. Joseph raised the very important point of validating men and women who are performing outstandingly in spite of being in protracted acting arrangements.

I dare say too, although some others have treaded around it, moved around it tangentially, that in spite of being paid at the lower levels or levels that are less desirable than one would expect from individuals who have to fulfil the levels of responsibility that they fulfil and who are exposed to so many different elements in their day-to-day duties, this debate must not close or I could not allow it to close without drawing attention to the recognition that there is the need for improved remuneration of the Royal Barbados Police Force and indeed the outstanding men and women that serve more widely within the armed forces. This is an issue that must be addressed.

We must endeavour at all times to guard against demoralisation and as I said to give our country the opportunity to benefit from the best of the best. Among the factors that lead to demoralisation is not only pay but making sure that our outstanding service men at all levels can be confirmed in their posts. If we are to find and retain the best more than retirement age has to be addressed, more than retirement age must be a priority. It is time perhaps for us to move to a more comprehensive reform, a reform that gives attention to the human resources prerequisites of effective recruitment, training, training people to ensure that once recruited when the demand arises for them to step up to the plate that they can do so and do so admirably and to the requisite of providing opportunity and of course addressing the ever important issue of compensation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I recognise that the issues raised in my submission are not only a Barbados phenomenon but they are issues that are of concerning the forces in other parts of the world where we see officials trying to pump up falling numbers by looking at how they are attracting people, revisiting the retirement age yes, but also relooking

the application process to see how they can maybe waive some of the stipulations and make the application process a lot easier by making things a lot more attractive to potentials out there.

My intervention this morning therefore is not one that is intended to divide the House. I said that at the onset that I support and I understand the rationale for the amendments proposed before us but it is to give us cause to look beyond what we have done or what we are attempting to do in the amendments by providing able-bodied men and women with the opportunity to work past what would be a relatively young age. I say so as a person who is equally young considering the ages that we have been describing, but it causes us to recognise the more important need for planning effectively for the future and recognising that there is a requirement for a more holistic and comprehensive approach to HR (Human Resource) planning to address the issue in the armed forces, the Royal Barbados Police Force, and more widely the issues in the public sector, so I stand in this contribution to support the amendments but to urge that in very short time we move past just addressing those that were raised here this morning to look to a system that would more readily and effectively address the requirement for planning, recruitment, retention, succession and opportunity so that we can support progression.

I thank you.

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

Hon. R. R. STRAUGHN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give my support to the amendment before the Chamber very conscious that as a reservist technically I could not have allowed this debate to conclude without making a contribution. I say so, Sir, because my regimental number is 9621956, Sir.

Asides.

Hon. R. R. STRAUGHN: I say so proudly because I know the good work that members of the reserve element of the Barbados Defence Force (BDF) fulfil, supporting the full-time or regular unit of the BDF. Even in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, I know a number of the reservists were called out and have continued to support the work of the broader force in order to ensure that Barbados is kept safe, first and foremost, as well as being able to respond to the challenges with which the country has been faced, Sir. The truth is that the BDF, like all of our protective forces, really is in a mode of transition and transformation. These are some of the challenges that all of our forces will have to confront in the near future, simply because of the changing mandate which they will be expected to respond to.

Therefore, we have to ensure that we give the appropriate support as required in order to effect those changes.

Sir, the Honourable Member for St. George North raised some of those issues in terms of resources, but I say so because the reality is that a lot of the systems which exist not only in the BDF but certainly in the Royal Barbados Police Force, the Prison Service, the Fire Service and even Customs and Immigration, as part of the broader set of forces, are now in a mode of transformation that we hope will allow us to attract not only young people but the talent required to respond to the challenges of the 21st Century. Therefore, that is the path which the BDF is on. Sir, I say that conscious of the fact that the BDF has a very strict rank structure which, as you would appreciate, entails that you take orders from the top down and that you follow those orders. However, in the 21st Century the structure of some of these organisations, from a capacity perspective, would often include some level of conflict -- for lack of a better word -- in that some of the issues which we would confront in this century require that the structure and the way in which these organisations operate now would have to be ceded to those with the specific expertise to ensure that they can effectively respond to the issues confronting the organisations.

Sir, I was not here for the full presentation of the Attorney General but I heard the Honourable Member for Christ Church East refer to the cyber regiment, and that is an area which is certainly very exciting but the reality is that there is very limited capacity within the existing structure of the Barbados Defence Force to be able to respond to that. Therefore, Sir, in recruiting and bringing in personnel to deal with that, the way in which the Force pivots and is able to accommodate and respond to such challenges, just like the Police and any other disciplined force, it means that the existing structures are 20th Century structures, rigidly enforced. However, in a 21st Century structure it would mean that in terms of those persons you are asking to come into an organisation which is steeped in, for the most part, colonial history and the way in which orders are given and executed, we would have to ensure that we create an environment that would, in order to be effective, feature those structures which are important from a disciplinary perspective while making room for the professionals and those with the relevant expertise to come in and be able to thrive in such an environment. While accountability is important, Sir, I believe in the 21st Century and going forward our citizens would expect greater effectiveness in the delivery of services that entities like the BDF would provide.

Sir, the reality is that, for most Barbadians, we really do not think about the army because it is not necessarily part of our day-to-day thinking. For example, while persons may have more contact with the Royal Barbados Police Force by way of reporting incidents, the truth is that the

Barbados Defence Force, like the Police, Fire Service, Immigration and Customs, forms part of that suite of collective services which, really and truly, nobody can opt out of unless you create your own little Barbados somewhere else or have your own island. You really cannot opt out of the services that these entities provide for the country, because these collective services all go towards ensuring that the safety of the country is maintained.

Sir, I really want to thank the members of the Force who continue to make sacrifices long hours away from their families. I know that some of us in here can attest to what that feels like, but I want to equally say thanks to the BDF in a time of emergency and to the reservists when they are called out and are expected to respond to national crises. I want to thank them, and their families for allowing them to be able to execute their duties in the name of the defence of Barbados and to allow us to feel safe at night and as we go about our business.

Sir, the truth is that the transformation continues, both digitally and in terms of the internal reforms of the Barbados Defence Force. We have been ensuring that we give the necessary financing as required. I know this is not necessarily the specific debate to get into those details, but subject obviously to the onset of COVID we had envisioned, in terms of the BDF and the protective services, ways of ensuring how the transformation would be made to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. Obviously, COVID has intervened, so it has meant that we have had to redirect significant resources to deal with the pandemic itself. However, we have still been able to make provision for some of the very critical support services in the circumstances, and I say to the members of the BDF that this Government will continue to make the necessary provisions to ensure that they can all meet the mandate as required. By the same token, as we expect to see the COVID pandemic subside, we also expect to be able to give more direct attention not just to the resourcing, as required for these entities, but certainly to meeting the challenges of the 21st Century on a broader level.

Sir, the entire Government is still committed to transformation, and I know that for the last year-and-a-half it has been a challenge for all of the members of the BDF to be on alert to provide support under the directives in which we have been operating. It has been challenging, and I can tell you that the costs of dealing with these types of responses, as opposed to dealing with the transformational issues, are significant, Sir. However, we want to move towards a situation where we can be transforming and where the members of the BDF and the public can see the kind of value-for-money, for want of a better term. The reality is while resources can be made available, it is still up to us the ordinary citizens to ensure that we do our part. When these officers, these men and women, ordinary Barbadians like you and me, Sir, go out as part of the

patrols and the Coast Guard, they put their lives in danger each time because you never know what you may meet on the horizon. We, therefore, want to ensure that we give them our fullest possible support in order that they can carry out their duties as effectively as possible.

I am in full support of the objective of ensuring that we can utilise all of the possible resources for as long as we can, given that we are a small open economy and we really do not have the luxury. Sir, I have now realised that I am also at that age as the Honourable Member for St. George North indicated, because I will tell you, I have a very good friend who is a Major and when he said that he was retiring, he took all of us by surprise in the group chat, so we started to ask ourselves that how is it that a man could be retiring at 45 years old. Hence, these very regulations that we are referring to here, certainly at age 45 we have a lot that we can still offer I would like to imagine. In a small society with very limited resources and without necessarily impacting succession planning as the Honourable Member for St. George North indicated, I think it makes sense for us to ensure that we can do both, organise the succession planning properly, but at the same time by the same token being able to utilise all of the available resources that we do have. I also think that this small amendment will go a long way to ensuring that the first is able to not just retain persons within the context of the service of the Force. That is why I said earlier that technically I am still reserve because I could be called out as required. However, the point is, whatever small contribution that I could make to the effort I will be more than happy to do, because the truth is that it is all about how we utilise the very scarce resources that we do have as a country. This transformation effort that we are undertaking broadly as Government, this is going to be a very critical piece of the puzzle in terms of the utilisation of skills, personnel and as well as any financial resources that we do have to ensure that the best possible service can be provided for the people of Barbados and I believe that this particular amendment will go a long way to helping the Force to better manage those very scarce resources, get some additional resources in at the reserves level from a technical perspective to be able to help meet some of the challenges of the 21st century.

Once it appears innocuous on the surface, in reality I believe this will go a very long way to dealing with some of the long standing issues that we have been confronting in the Force.

Sir, I wholeheartedly support this amendment and I want to say a heartfelt thank you to the members of the Force who have been working around the clock to support the members of the Barbados Police Force as well as the other security agencies to be able to ensure that all of us can sleep well at night and I want to thank them and their families for their service. Thank you Sir, I am obliged to you.

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, let me thank all of the Members of Parliament who participated in this debate and while we may not have laboured long on the subject matter, I think that every person who contributed made very weighty and significant interventions. I would like to mention a few things.

Let me thank the Minister of Home Affairs for clarifying what is in my head but what I did not articulate specifically. The regulations are being amended as an integral part and parcel of the amendment to the Act, so we are amending the Act and that is what Chamber is doing, but the regulations are also to be amended. Sir, let me say this, very often, and this goes back from the very beginning of this Parliament, we will bring legislation to Parliament and promise regulations to come. These regulations have already been prepared and I believe that they will go before Cabinet I expect on Thursday for approval, so that this is not a case where the regulations were lagged and show up at some future point that is not known or cannot be determined. These regulations have already been drafted by the Chief Parliamentary Council's Office. I have already certified them as being fit to be signed by the Minister and therefore Cabinet just needs to give its final sign off and I expect that to happen on Thursday and therefore so long as this Bill is passed in the other place and assented by Her Excellency then the regulations will be sent into force.

The second matter that I want to mention is the query that was made by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in respect of Section 9 of the substantive Act, which says essentially that the Governor-General has operational control of the Barbados Defence Force but that in the situation where no operational directions have been given by the Governor-General then it is opened to the Prime Minister so to do. Sir, I am happy to say that in the year since 1979 when this Bill was first passed there have been no issues, but let me be candid, there are a number of things which arise on a day to day basis where the Executive has had to give instructions to the Barbados Defence Force. We spoke earlier about the distribution of food and other relief. That is a clear instance where the Prime Minister has used the executive authority conferred by the Act, given an operational direction to the Barbados Defence Force for the safety and security of the State. Notwithstanding that it comes in the context of COVID that COVID issue is in the context of an emergency power situation. There are many times Mr. Speaker when we have in the past and likely will continue to the support of the Barbados Defence Force through a direct instruction from the Prime Minister. There has been no challenge in the past and the Prime Minister can only give operational directions where the Governor-General has not done so. I think that our experience shows us that there is no risk of those powers being used in a way that is negative.

However, if there was ever any doubt, the circumstances because Section 9 (2) says specifically at the end and I can quote it, "The Chief of Staff of the Barbados Defence Force is, subject to the directions of the Governor-General, responsible for the operational use of the Force, but the Prime Minister may, where no directions have been given by the Governor-General, give to the Chief of Staff directions with respect to the operational use of the Barbados Defence Force in Barbados for the purposes of maintaining and securing public order and public safety, as the Prime Minister thinks fit; and the Chief of Staff shall comply with those directions." This Bill was passed in 1979, none of us were in Parliament at the time, and none of us were the Executive at the time. It has served us well, there have been no issues and I think that we can have confidence in our systems of Government in our checks and balances. There may well be a time when we may want to consider a larger review of these things but at this point in time I do not think we need to be unduly concerned about the way in which the Barbados Defence Force has been used to support the maintenance of civil society and maintenance of law and order in this country. Mr. Speaker, I thank Members for their reminiscences. I thank Members for their quiet admissions but most of all I thank them for their support of this Bill.

I, therefore, ask that this Bill be read a second time.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAM: I beg to second that.

APPOINTMENT OF

TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES

Mr. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, we have to appoint a temporary Chairman because the Chairman is absent.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Honourable Member for St. George North be appointed as Temporary Chairman of Committees.

Hon. W. A. ABRAHAM: I beg to second that.

The question that the Honourable Member for St. George North be appointed as Chairman of Committees was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

Mr. SPEAKER left the Chair and the House went into Committee, Ms. T. N. S.-A. MOORE in the Chair.

COMMITTEE

Madam CHAIRMAN: This House is in Committee.

Clause 1 was called and passed.

Clause 2 was called.

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Madam Chairman, I wish to move an amendment to Clause 2 to delete the words “the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and replace it with “a rank not lower than Lieutenant Colonel”.

I beg to move that Clause 2, stand part, as amended.

The question that Clause 2 as amended stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

Clause 3 was called and passed.

On the motion of Hon. D. D. MARSHALL seconded by Hon. W. A. Abrahams, Madam CHAIRMAN reported to His Honour the SPEAKER the passing of one Bill, with amendments, in Committee and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

On the separate motions of Hon. D. D. MARSHALL seconded by Hon. J. A. KING, the Bill was read a third time and passed and cited as the Defence (Amendment) Act, 2021.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. D. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker and Members of the Chamber, this brings us to the end of our business for today. I beg to move that this House be now adjourned to July 27, 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

Hon. J. A. KING: I beg to second that.

The question that the House do now adjourn until Tuesday, July 27, 2021 at 10.00 a.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER adjourned the House accordingly.

12.27 p.m.

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EDITORIAL NOTES — NOT PART OF THE REPORT

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

EDITORIAL QUERIES

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

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

Q2. Order No. 4, second reading. After Hon. D. D. Marshall's reply and Hon. W. A. Abrahams' seconding, the source does not record the question on the second reading being put; it moves straight to the appointment of a Temporary Chairman of Committees. Printed as in the source.

Q3. Government Notices and First Reading. The title 'Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 2021' has an unbalanced bracket in both places. Printed as in the source.

Q4. Appointment of Temporary Chairman of Committees. The motion is that the Member for St. George North be appointed 'Temporary Chairman of Committees', but the question is recorded as her appointment 'as Chairman of Committees'. Printed as in the source.

Q5. Convening sentence. The convening sentence reads 'the House Assembly met', omitting 'of'. Printed as in the source.

DEBATE SUMMARY

(Editorial summary — not part of the record.)

The House of Assembly met on Tuesday, 20th July, 2021 at 10.00 a.m. at the Worthing Corporate Centre, Worthing, Christ Church, with Mr. Speaker, His Honour A. E. Holder, in the Chair; prayers were taken by Canon Father Ivan Harewood. The Minutes of Tuesday, 6th July, 2021 were confirmed. Mr. Speaker acknowledged the presence of the French Non-resident Ambassador to Barbados and resident Ambassador to the OECS, His Excellency Mr. Jacques-Henry Heuls, and the St. Thomas Youth Commissioner, Mr. Tyrell Giles.

Hon. D. D. Marshall gave notice of, and moved the first reading of, the Governor-General (Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 2021, the Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries Conditions of Service)

(Amendment) Bill, 2021 and the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2021, each seconded by Hon. W. A. Abrahams. Standing Orders were then suspended for the rest of the Sitting.

Under Order No. 4, Hon. D. D. Marshall moved the second reading of the Defence (Amendment) Bill, 2021, amending the Defence Act, Cap. 159, passed in 1979 to replace the system inherited from the Barbados Regiment. He paid tribute to the Barbados Defence Force's distribution of relief during the State of Emergency, its field hospital deployed during COVID-19, the Coast Guard and the Cadet Corps, and to Major Florence Gittens, still working with the Force in her 80s. Among the changes, members could remain in the reserves until the age of 65 rather than leaving at 55, and the Defence Board could consider a larger class of persons for appointment. Hon. Miss C. Y. Forde seconded.

The Leader of the Opposition, Bishop the Hon. Bishop J. J. S. Atherley, thanked the Defence Force and the Coast Guard for their recent work in Barbados and the Caribbean, but urged caution in using the Force in civilian exercises, noting that the Royal Barbados Police Force was depleted by some 200 members. Hon. W. A. Abrahams argued that the Bill fell in line with accepted views on the value of older persons, pointing to the engineers, IT and human resources staff behind any army. Ms. T. N. S-A. Moore, whose opening was lost because her microphone was off, raised the under-resourcing of the armed forces and the problems of recruitment and acting appointments in the Police Force. Hon. R. R. Straughn spoke of the reservists called out during COVID-19 and the limited capacity for a cyber regiment.

In reply, Mr. Marshall said that the regulations were being amended together with the Act, and answered the Leader of the Opposition's query on section 9 of the Act, under which the Governor-General has operational control of the Force. The Member for St. George North, Ms. T. N. S-A. Moore, was appointed Temporary Chairman of Committees in the absence of the Chairman. In Committee, Clause 2 was amended to replace 'the rank of Lieutenant Colonel' with 'a rank not lower than Lieutenant Colonel', and the Bill was read a third time and passed as the Defence (Amendment) Act, 2021.

On the motion of Hon. D. D. Marshall, seconded by Hon. J. A. King, the House was adjourned until Tuesday, 27th July, 2021 at 10.00 a.m.