
THE SENATE DEBATES

(UNOFFICIAL REPORT)

PARLIAMENT 2003 – 2008

THE SENATE

Friday, August 13, 2004

The Senate met in the Senate Chamber, Parliament

Buildings on Friday, August 13, 2004, at 11.15 a.m.

PRESENT

Her Honour Senator Dame PATRICIA SYMMONDS, D.B.E., G.C.M., B.A.(Hons.) (PGCE), J.P.
(Deputy President)

Senator the Hon. E. R. GRIFFITH, GCM, J.P.
(Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
(Leader of Government's Business))

Senator T. E. BARKER B.A.(Hons.),M.A.(Econ.),
J.P.

(Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Finance and
Economic Affairs), J.P.

Senator Sir JOHN STANLEY GODDARD, K.A.,
G.C.M., B.Com., F.C.A. (Hons.), LL.D. (Honorary
(U.W.I.))

Senator B. R. COLLYMORE, C.M.G.

Senator R. W. GRANT, B.A. (Econ.), G.Dip.M.A.
(Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and
International Transport)

Senator the Hon. Miss L. V. EASTMOND, LL.B.
(Hons.), LL.M.

(Minister of Commerce, Consumer Affairs and
Business Development)

Senator I. St.C. LINTON

Senator G. P. B. NICHOLLS, B.Sc.(Hons.), LL.B.
(Hons.)

Senator I. G. P. GOODING-EDGHILL

Senator F. J. STUART, B.A., LL.M.

Senator Dr. D. S. LOWE, Ed.D., M.Ed., B.A.,Dip.
Theology

Senator the Very Reverend H. E. CRICHLow,
G.C.M., B.A. (Hons.) (Dunelm)

*Prayers were led by Reverend Father Errington
Massiah.*

MADAM PRESIDENT: This Senate is in Session.

MESSAGES FROM HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

MADAM PRESIDENT: The President has received
the following letter:

“Dear Mr. President: I shall be away from the island
during the period August 9 to August 24, 2004, on vacation
in Grenada. In accordance with the provisions of Section
29(1) of the Constitution, the President of the Senate, His
Honour Senator Sir Fred W. Gollop, K.A. will perform the
functions of the office of Governor-General during my
absence. As the Honourable the Senate will not be meeting
prior to my departure, it will not be possible for the usual
formal Message to be sent down to your Chamber. Will
you, therefore, please bring my absence formally to the
attention of the Honourable The Senate when next it
meets.”

ANNOUNCEMENTS

MADAM PRESIDENT: I have been asked to offer
excuses for the absence of the following:

Senator Patricia Parris

Senator Dr. Francis Chandler

Senator Allan Fields

Senator Sir Roy Trotman

Senator Sandra Husbands

Also, I wish to ask Honourable Members to speak directly into the microphone as there is a technical problem.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS

SENATOR THE HON. E. R. GRIFFITH: Madam President, by command I lay the following documents:

1. Report on the Audit of Accounts of the Auditor General's Department for the Financial Years 2002/2003 and 2003/2004.
2. Report of the National Commission on Law and Order.
3. Animal (Diseases) Pathogenic Avian Influenza (Notifiable Diseases) (Order) 2004.

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE SITTING OF THE SENATE

SENATOR THE HON. E. R. GRIFFITH: Madam President, in view of the contents of the letter which you read from His Excellency the Governor-General and the fact that you are presiding in the Chair, I consider it necessary for us to appoint an Acting Deputy President.

I beg to move that Senator Newton be appointed as Acting Deputy President for the remainder of this Sitting.

The question was put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 2 – RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE VESTING IN THE NATIONAL HOUSING CORPORATION OF THE PARCEL OF LAND SITUATE AT PIPERS AVENUE, CAVE HILL IN THE PARISH OF ST. MICHAEL FOR THE PURPOSE OF HOUSING DEVELOPMENT.

SENATOR THE HON. E. R. GRIFFITH: Madam Deputy President, land is one of the scarce resources of our country and in light of the increasing number of activities taking place as the country continues on its developmental path, there is always a problem resulting from the conflicting interest and demands for this scarce resource.

Sir, if left to the market situation, land is likely to find itself in a situation where it guarantees the best return. It is for this reason and others, that the Government from time to time finds it necessary to make acquisitions of parcels of land to be used for public purposes. In this particular case, the purpose is for housing development and the Resolution before us seeks approval for the vesting of this parcel of land at Pipers Avenue in Cave Hill in the National Housing Corporation...

S19/Sequence 2

11.20 a.m.

Friday, August 13, 2004

SENATOR HON. E.R. GRIFFITH: Madam Deputy President, land is an issue which people discuss with some intensity and great emotion because of the scarcity of that commodity. We have witnessed land being removed rapidly out of agriculture and into other developments even though there is evidence to suggest that at this point and time in our development there is no need for an encroachment of agricultural land for housing and other purposes. It is still an unfortunate situation where there is an adequate amount of land that can be used for housing purposes if we choose to use that land wisely. There is no need for us to allow land to move from agriculture into housing and other areas.

Madam Deputy President, over the years, the National Housing Corporation was put in control of land, which is now referred to as the land bank. However, this parcel of land in question is to be added to the lands which they now control and to be used in the particular case for the development of 12 duplex, low-income units.

One of the primary objectives of this Administration is to facilitate housing development for the low-income group in this country. To some extent the market will take care of the middle and upper income groups in the society but it would hardly take care of the lower income group. That is one of the responsibilities entrusted to the National Housing Corporation. They must seek to provide housing solutions for the low-income group in the country and the idea behind this vesting is simply to facilitate the development of the number of units for use by the low-income group.

There are a number of initiatives which have been pursued over time by this administration which have been aimed at meeting the demands of this particular group on which we now focus, the low-income group, and I think that I should mention a few of them.

Madam Deputy President, the one which readily comes to mind is the decision which was taken to facilitate access to lots at the very competitive price of \$2.50 per square foot within the context where land is in excess of \$8.00 a square foot. Madam Deputy President, that was a continuation of an earlier scheme which dealt with the tenantry land. This case deals with private land by a facility through the Urban Development Commission and Rural Development Commission to make up the difference between the market price of the \$2.50, so that the targeted groups would still have access to that land at \$2.50 per square foot. Madam Deputy President, one cannot understate the significance of that decision within the

present context in which we live and, therefore, I thought that I needed to highlight this.

In addition, there were a number of initiatives aimed at this particular group. One of those is the decision to facilitate 100 per cent mortgages. There was also the income tax rebate for property owners and the relief which was brought through the amendment to the Land Tax Act which resulted in a reduction of the burden of land tax particularly in relation to properties of \$125,000 and under.

Madam Deputy President, there was a boost to the General Workers Housing Loan Scheme to facilitate the increase in the number of loans from that fund and the extension of the age from 60 to 65 so as to allow an additional number of persons to continue to benefit from that Scheme. There was also the extension of the repayment period from 20 years to 40 to facilitate that group. Other benefits included the decision to restore the benefit that was removed under the Income Tax Act to persons for refurbishing or maintenance to properties.

Madam Deputy President, the point is, all of these initiatives have been aimed at the lower income group with the objective of ensuring that they are able to have a solution to their housing problems. In that context I am satisfied that this Resolution before us deserves our support and I beg to move that it be approved.

MADAM DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Dr. Lowe.

SENATOR Dr. D.S. LOWE: Madam Deputy President, I believe that all of us would agree that the matter of housing is of critical importance to all persons involved in policy development. For successive administrations the matter of housing has been a critical matter in this country. The institution that has been designated as the vanguard for rectifying to a reasonable extent housing issues in Barbados is still, in the opinion of many, including those of us on This Side, not able to create a formula that would demonstrate, in some sustainable way, the reduction or the arresting of the housing situation in Barbados, particularly as it relates to housing for the poor.

S19:Sequence 3

11.30 a.m.

Wednesday, August 13, 2004

Senate 19, sequence 4, 11.30 a.m.

Senator Dr. D.S. LOWE: Madam Deputy President, I believe that the availability of land for the purpose of housing is indeed important. I also believe in seeking to

strike a balance between the management and the utilisation of land, in that land must be set aside and protected for the purpose of agriculture, while at the same time national development dictates that land is also identified as secure for the purpose of housing.

The notion of the National Housing Corporation setting up a land bank or becoming land speculators, is rather strange because when one thinks about depositing in a bank, one thinks about housing one's assets therein, with some advice as it relates to accessing those assets over time.

Over the last several years, the most we heard from the National Housing Corporation has been its vigour in collecting lands across the landscape of this great country of ours, and while it continues with some fervour to collect land, the prices of low-income housing continues to loom large in our faces.

I am of the view, and I believe it is a shared view, that we need to do a very detailed analysis of the performance of this Corporation to see whether or not it has been able to deliver its mandate on housing for poor people in this country. We need to ask ourselves whether or not it has employed reasonable mechanisms that would assist in the reduction of the cost of low-income houses, and also assist in the acceleration of the availability of some of the same lands that it has feathery nested in its grasp.

I believe that the time has come for us to seriously understand that low-income housing is at a crisis state, and I believe it is a shared view on all sides of politics, since there are those on the Other Side who have agreed that the performance of this institution is lacking, and we need to look carefully at how we can, in fact, revive this institution to fulfill its mandate in that regard.

Madam Deputy President, the whole matter of shelter is critical as it relates to human growth and development. Within the context of national development, shelter, security and the ability to satisfy one's hunger and one's thirst are all important to quality of life issues.

Madam Deputy President, the matter of shelter has to be resolved because shelter provides some measure of security. It gives a road map for family development, and it allows individuals to plot a course that is somewhat stable within the society and guarantees that there is, as we say so often in this society, a roof over every man's head, and man not to suggest any gender specificity, but over every person's head in this country.

I am impassioned by the view that there are those out there who have toiled for many years, still within the category of low-income earning, and they continue to roam this country in search of solutions for housing. Somehow,

we have not, individually, as political institutions or we have not collectively, as the same, come up with any meaningful remedy for this national crisis which is on our hands.

I am a product of the late 1950s. I am pleased to date myself, Madam Deputy President. I grew up at a time when housing seemed to be much more closely within the grasp of poor people. I remember a former Minister of Government, the late Joy Edwards who has his name etched in political history, and it is interpreted differently by different people, actually. In the 1960s there was a flood in St. Andrew that very much covered a place called, Shorey Village and he, perhaps at the displeasure of his political leader, went in and rebuilt that district. As you know, the records of this Honourable Chamber would suggest most vividly that I am a product of St. Andrew.

Madam Deputy President, this was not only restricted to Shorey Village because I also remember distinctly that many persons went through other crises related to housing. They lost their houses, as a result of fire, flooding, et cetera. I remember my family and, as a matter of fact, there were many families who were able to get two bedroom and three bedroom board houses rebuilt, at what we would say, next kin to nothing.

Madam President, I am talking about easing the burden of those who cannot help themselves in this society, because the ability given to them by their earning power, would not allow them to be able to escalate their capacity to purchase at a level that middle class Barbadians and upper class Barbadians can do. Therefore, I am not so much concerned about the collection of land, as long as the redistribution of that land works to the benefit of those who sit at the bottom of the earning level in this country.

I can point to a housing development in a place called Apes Hill, St. James, Madam President, and this is not a joke, the bottom threshold of the cost of houses was \$85 000. At the time I had a political interest in St. Andrew, and I remember visiting some owners there who were very concerned about a particular issue.

The truth is that these persons were making \$200 to \$300 a week. What marvelled me about the houses they were purchasing for \$85 000 and up, was the space of the house. As a matter of fact, the infrastructure of the house was not part of the deal and they had to put in their own cabinets and so on. In less than a year, the fixtures in the house, the locks and the light fixtures were falling off and they had to repair them themselves. What was most facetious in my view, is that if you happen to rush into your bathroom, you had no turn-around space, so if you went in with your face in, you had to back out. You could not turn because if you attempted to turn, you would leave part of

your sinews on the walls of that rather conservative bathroom.

Madam Deputy President, many of those persons would have to work for their entire life span to be able to pay the \$85 000, and many of their sons and daughters would inherit the cost of that house. These are people who are in their child bearing years, young women and men whom you expect would be adding children to the family as they went along, and I cannot for the life of me imagine how the State could propose to build these rather strange units, for lack of a better terminology. There is little land for improvement so you have to build up. You cannot build out because there is not enough space in many of these building units. These persons would be stuck there, unless they decide to rent out that unit, and collect money to go and build again.

Madam Deputy President, I might say this to you that in some cases, there were persons living in those units who have their palatial houses but they were renting units that they were able to get, above the members of the community who have been waiting on a list for 15 years. This brings me to my next question. What is the methodology used by the National Housing Corporation for the selection of persons who should get houses and land?

Senate 19, sequence 4,

11.40 a.m.

Friday, August 13, 2004

SENATOR Dr. D. S. LOWE: I know for a fact that there are persons who have been waiting on a list at the National Housing Corporation for 15 years to get a house spot and there are persons who have recently come along in the same community and one person I know for a fact has two house lots in the same district and they live in St. George. This happens to be a district in Christ Church East that I so proudly represent. So I want to know whether or not the Government has done a study to see how the National Housing Corporation has been performing.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

SENATOR THE HON. E. R. GRIFFITH: Madam Deputy President, we are experiencing some technical difficulties at the moment and in the process I beg to move that this Sitting be suspended until 1.00 p.m. today.

The question that the Sitting do now suspend until 1.00 p.m. today was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Madam Deputy President suspended the Sitting accordingly.

Senate 19 Sequence 5

12.10 p.m.

Friday, August 13, 2004

RESUMPTION

MADAM DEPUTY PRESIDENT: This Sitting is resumed.

SENATOR Dr. D. S. LOWE: Madam Deputy President, as I was noting and shall so conclude, the housing issue in Barbados is a critical one that requires the minds, the hearts and the hands of all Barbadians, irrespective of their political allegiances, and that we must continue to seek to forge solutions that ensure that those persons who stand in the greatest need for help, will receive that help in a most urgent way. After all, housing is a critical issue that stands as a pivotal priority for any Government, indeed, anyone involved in the making of policy matters.

I thank you, Madam Deputy President.

S:No. 19 (9)

1.50 p.m.

Friday, August 13, 2004

SENATOR THE HON. E.R. GRIFFITH: Madam President, I have taken careful notes of the issues raised by Senator Lowe. We all agree on the desire for a satisfactory solution to the housing problems in the country particularly those experienced by the low-income group. It is certainly the Government's intention to continue to strive to provide solutions to that category of persons. In that context, I appreciate the suggestions made by the Other Side.

I beg to move that the Resolution do now pass.

The question was put and agreed to.

ORDER NO. 3 – RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE
VESTING IN THE NATIONAL HOUSING CORPORATION
OF THE PARCELS OF LAND OF LAND THE
PROPERTY OF THE CROWN, SITUATE AT
FOUR HILL PLANTATION AND FRENCH
VILLAGE IN THE PARISH OF ST.
PETER FOR THE PURPOSE OF
HOUSING DEVELOPMENT.

SENATOR THE HON. E. R. GRIFFITH: Madam Deputy President, this is similar to the one just approved by the Senate and the issues to be raised are of the same nature. I doubt that Honourable Senators would want to engage in a second debate of similar matter and run the risk of repeating themselves.

Therefore, I beg to move that this Resolution do now pass.

The question was put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

SENATOR THE HON. E. R. GRIFFITH: Madam Deputy President, this brings us to the end of business for today. It is that time of year when it is customary to take a break and recharge our batteries so to speak.

I wish to thank all Honourable Senators for their contribution during the past months and express appreciation to the management and staff of Parliament for their hard work during that period of time. I trust that everyone takes the opportunity in this summer break to get much needed rest.

Madam Deputy President, I beg to move that this Sitting be adjourned sine die.

SENATOR F. J. STUART: I, too extend thanks to them and on behalf of my colleagues wish them a restful summer unmolested by us. It should be more restful and commodious than when we are around.

I fully associate myself with comments of Senator Griffith and want to thank you, Madam Deputy President, for the impartiality and the good way in which you have steered the deliberations of the Senate.

Madam Deputy President, I thank you.

MADAM DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I wish to associate myself with the comments of the two previous speakers apart from the complimentary remarks about myself.

The question that the Senate do now adjourn sine die was put to the SENATE and agreed to and Madam Deputy President adjourned the Senate accordingly.

S19/Sequence 10

1.57 p.m.

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PUBLIC BUSINESS

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RESUMPTION

ORDER NO. 2 (resumed)

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ORDER NO. 3 – RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE
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STUART, Senator F. J.

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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. Chair. Her Honour Senator Dame Patricia Symmonds, the Deputy President, presided, the President being Acting Governor-General. The Chair is labelled ‘MADAM PRESIDENT’ for the opening business and ‘MADAM DEPUTY PRESIDENT’ thereafter, and Senators address both titles. Senator Newton, appointed Acting Deputy President for the rest of the Sitting, does not appear in the PRESENT list. Printed as in the source.

Q3. Order No. 3, heading. The Resolution’s title reads ‘THE PARCELS OF LAND OF LAND THE PROPERTY OF THE CROWN’. Printed as in the source.

Q4. Take-slips, Order No. 2. One take-slip is dated ‘Wednesday, August 13, 2004’; the Sitting was on a Friday. Two take-slips are numbered ‘sequence 4’ (11.30 a.m. and 11.40 a.m.). Printed as in the source.

Q5. Suspension and resumption. The Sitting was suspended ‘until 1.00 p.m.’, but the take-slips that follow read 12.10 p.m. and 1.50 p.m., and Senator Dr. D. S. Lowe concludes only a short passage after the resumption. Printed as in the source.

DEBATE SUMMARY

(Editorial summary — not part of the record.)

The Senate met on Friday, 13th August, 2004 at 11.15 a.m., with the Deputy President, Her Honour Senator Dame Patricia Symmonds, in the Chair; prayers were led by Reverend Father Errington Massiah. A letter from the Governor-General was read, stating that he would be away on vacation in Grenada from 9th to 24th August, 2004 and that the President of the Senate, His Honour Senator Sir Fred W. Gollop, would perform the functions of Governor-General in his absence. Excuses were offered for Senators Patricia Parris, Dr. Francis Chandler, Allan Fields, Sir Roy Trotman and Sandra Husbands, and Senators were asked to speak directly into the microphones because of a technical problem.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and Leader of Government Business, Senator the Hon. E. R. Griffith, laid the Report on the Audit of Accounts of the Auditor General’s Department for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004, the Report of the National Commission on Law and Order and the Animal (Diseases) Pathogenic Avian Influenza (Notifiable Diseases) (Order) 2004. On his motion Senator Newton was appointed Acting Deputy President for the rest of the Sitting.

Senator Griffith moved Order No. 2, the Resolution to approve the vesting in the National Housing Corporation of a parcel of land at Pipers Avenue, Cave Hill, St. Michael for housing development. He said the land would be added to the Corporation’s land bank and used for 12 duplex low-income units. He listed the Government’s measures for the low-income group: lots at \$2.50 a square foot where land cost over \$8.00, 100 per cent mortgages, land tax relief for properties of \$125,000 and under, and changes to the General Workers Housing Loan Scheme raising the age limit from 60 to 65 and the repayment period from 20 to 40 years.

Senator Dr. D. S. Lowe called low-income housing a national crisis and questioned the National Housing Corporation acting as a land speculator while prices remained high. He recalled houses rebuilt cheaply after a flood at Shorey Village, St. Andrew in the 1960s, and cited houses at Apes Hill, St. James priced from \$85 000 for buyers earning \$200 to \$300 a week, with fixtures that failed within a year. He asked what method the Corporation used to select applicants, saying some had waited 15 years while others with homes elsewhere obtained units or lots.

The Sitting was suspended because of technical difficulties. On resumption Senator Lowe concluded that housing needed the efforts of all Barbadians regardless of politics. Senator Griffith said he had noted the issues raised and that the Government intended to keep providing solutions for the low-income group. The Resolution was agreed to. Order No. 3, a similar Resolution vesting in the Corporation Crown land at Four Hill Plantation and French Village, St. Peter, was agreed to without debate.

On the motion to adjourn sine die, Senator Griffith thanked Senators and the management and staff of Parliament. Senator F. J. Stuart associated himself with those thanks and thanked the Deputy President for her impartiality, and the Senate was adjourned sine die.