THE

SENATE DEBATES

(UNOFFICIAL REPORT)

SECOND SESSION 2008 – 2013

THE SENATE

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

The Senate met in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, on Wednesday, February 25, 2009, at 11.10 a.m.

PRESENT

His Honour SENATOR Dr. B. M. Taitt, B.A., M.P.A. LL.B(Hons.) D.H.L.(Hons.) (President)

Her Honour SENATOR K. F. Ifill, B.Sc.(Hons.), M.B.A. (Deputy President)

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN, M.A., M.B.A., B.Sc.(Hons.), (Minister in the Prime Minister's Office), (Leader of the Senate)

SENATOR the Hon. H. L. BENN, E.M.B.A. (Marketing), (Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)

SENATOR the Hon. A. B. WALTERS, DPSA(Oxford), M.A., (Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office)

SENATOR the Hon. D. W. BOYCE, B.Sc. (Econ.), (Minister of State, Ministry of Finance)

SENATOR Mrs. V. I. SANDIFORD-GARNER, M.B.A., CIM, Dip. Mng., (Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Community Development and Culture)

SENATOR Rev. P. A. V. MILLINGTON, M. (Theol.)

SENATOR D. McD. Alleyne, M.A., B.A.

SENATOR P. W. B. GILKES

SENATOR Miss P. I. INNISS, B.Sc.(Hons.)

SENATOR D. K. A. GRIFFITH

SENATOR Sir Roy TROTMAN, K.A., M.A.

SENATOR Sir John Stanley GODDARD, K.A., B.Com., F.C.A., LL.D,(Hon.)(U.W.I)

SENATOR the Hon. Mrs. V. E. NEWTON, S.C.M., M.A., B.A.(Spec. Hons.), LL.M. (Hons.) (U.W.I), F.L.A. (Gt. Brit.), L.E.C.

SENATOR the Very Reverend H. E. CRICHLOW, G.C.M., B.A. (Hons.) Duenelm

SENATOR Dr. F. L. CHANDLER, Ph.D, B.Sc. (Hons.)

SENATOR R. O. MARVILLE, B.A.(Hons.), M.A. African Studies, M.B.A.

SENATOR J. A. C. HUTSON, B.C.H., MRAC

SENATOR Miss H. E. THOMPSON, LL.B.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS, B.A., LL.B.

Prayers were led by the Very Rev. H. E. Crichlow.

Mr. PRESIDENT: This Senate is in session.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 1 – VALUE ADDED TAX (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2009

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN: Mr. President, I rise to support the Value Added Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2009, which seeks to provide VAT relief on properties valued up to $150 000 for first-time homeowners.

Mr. President, this amendment falls squarely within the broad ambit of the social policy and economic policy of the current Administration. It is anticipated that as we focus on the issue of housing, this Government is seeking to fulfill its mandate and its commitment to the people of this country to ensure that all of us have the opportunity, notwithstanding our financial situation, to have access to affordable decent housing. It is one component of a comprehensive policy which speaks to housing. Sir, that housing policy in turn is an element of a broader social policy which puts at the centre of our development the people of this country.

Mr. President, it is clear that we have to ensure that as we seek to fulfill our Manifesto promise, and it is by no accident that Manifesto speaks to Pathways to Progress, transforming the nation to meet the real needs of the people.

Mr. President, in respect of the housing component of its broad social and economic policy, that commitment to housing constitutes a pledge to improve access to property ownership.

It is a pledge to improve access, as I said before, to affordable housing and a critical component of that pledge is also access to affordable land.

We know that Barbadians of all walks of life aspire to home ownership. We grew up, certainly persons in my generation and in other places are referred to as baby boomers. Those are the persons born prior to Independence, a decade or more before Independence. We grew up hearing our parents and grandparents instilling in us the importance of property ownership. If they owned nothing else, Barbadians of previous generations felt the need to own land, and eventually build a house. Sir, we knew the creative techniques that were used to build houses.

I have heard Barbadians, my generation, speak of the efforts of their parents, purchasing lumber and blocks, accumulating using creative methods, saving a penny out of a cent, figuratively, to own, build or start a home. We know the designs that were used, the extensions that occurred as people's fortunes improved.

Sir, this Administration recognises that there must be a public policy of Government that citizens must be supported in their efforts to realise their dreams of owning a piece of land and a house.

Sir, this philosophy which informs the strategies that include the provision of VAT relief is indicative of a serious commitment, not only now, but long-standing commitment of the Democratic Labour Party to focussing on one of the very vital desires, ambitions and objectives of the average citizen.

Sir, we know of the philosophy which moved away from that which said to Barbadians, land must fetch its highest economic value. That was said in a very narrow sense. What that meant in terms of what was propagated, proposed and pushed by the previous Administration was, that a piece of land should be sold for the highest price it could fetch. In a country of 166 square miles, that translated into a rapid inflation of land prices. What does that mean for the average citizen? It places land out of the reach of persons, low income earners, young professionals, public servants, in several grades within the Public Service. If they could afford to raise the capital through savings and/or loans to buy land, it would, in fact, defer the next step, that is the acquisition of a house, for several years, and in some instances would make it nigh impossible.

It also meant that many young people would probably have frustrations when trying to realise their dream. For some of the elderly who also owned property. It also had implication for taxes and all of those things. Those things can be elaborated upon and will be elaborated upon.

At the end of the day, however, this Administration, as it did in the past, recognises now that it is important, as I said before, that Government facilitates the effort to achieve the acquisition of property and home ownership. It also recognises, within the broad scheme of things, within the broad policy framework of facilitating our people, the need to ensure that the elderly at the end of the continuum, want to live out their lives comfortably because, (1) They have a decent roof over their heads and, (2) They can retain ownership of this roof if they already have one. Sir, as the Manifesto said, decent housing is a key to a number of things. It is a key to good family life, for if we have a home that provides some basic minimum residence and accommodation for family, it facilitates that situation for that family.

It is also necessary to ensure and support educational success, as the Manifesto said. What does that mean? It translates into the fact that a child can come home, even in the minimum of circumstances, he or she could sit and do homework, with some place to sleep, and the parent can prepare meals in a kitchen that is properly accommodated, however modest, and at the end of the day that child benefits from feeling comfortable that their parent or guardian has provided decent shelter, even, as I said before, however modest.

Sir, it translates also into productivity at home. An employee who can get up and leave a home that is secure, We are experiencing at the moment some unseasonable rains, based on what traditional patterns obtain, and a person who has to leave a home wondering that on their return the bed would be soaked because of a leaking roof or bad sideboard, that person cannot focus fully on his or her job, but if they know they have a house that is well secured, with adequate shelter, he or she can go off to work and be comfortable.

It is on the basis of recognising the connections, the obvious connections between quality of life and accommodation, or our ability to focus on school, work and maintaining good relationships with our family, this Administration has sought to introduce several measures. The Government has a clear understanding, as I said before, and it has to be reiterated that all citizens have a right to decent affordable housing.

A critical component of that business of home ownership is land. Mr. President, I alluded to the impact that other economic and social policies would have had on land prices. As we know and as I said before, an essential

ingredient for the average Barbadian to acquire a home is the acquisition of land. As we know, land has been to date, certainly in the last decade, a major hurdle for our population, particularly those at the lower end of the income stage. A clear policy on land ownership, serious programmes to get land to first-time home owners must, therefore, be a priority as articulated, and has been in the process of implementation by this Administration.

The Democratic Labour Party Government recognises that we cannot solve our housing problem, without first solving the problem of land. We heard of, again for the last decade or more, a land bank, but as somebody said, that land bank probably received deposits, but there were no withdrawals or distribution of the interest earned on the land deposited in the bank. In other words, we did not see land being made available in adequate quantities, if at all, to the persons most deserving of that land. Those are the persons who needed Government assistance. Those are the persons I described before.

Sir, as a result, this Government has made a commitment to make available to the persons in most need, several options. One of those options includes the ability to purchase land, not necessarily at market prices. As I indicated before, if we focus strictly on market prices, we would have extreme difficulty trying to accommodate a lot of our citizens.

Sir, Government has therefore sought to set aside for those persons of low income means parcels of land at $5 a square foot. There has been a commitment. The land has been identified, 500 house lots for first-time owners at $5 per square foot. I believe that is a valuable injection for those persons who are aspiring to realise the Barbados dream.

11.30 a.m.

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN: In addition, beyond the first year or so, as I said, of the 500 lots that have been identified, there has been a commitment to provide, over the life of this first term of this Administration - the first five years - 2 500 house spots to low and middle-income housing.

Sir, it is also recognised that there are persons, who because of the sheer size of their income cannot, in the short-term, buy a house. A key component of our housing policy is one in which there is a commitment to create houses which are constructed to ensure that persons can rent, in the short term, with the intension of owning those houses.

I believe that the model is one which has significant merit because, at the end of the day, if you do your financial calculations and you look at the rent that is paid over a significant time, you would realise that in reality, that person by renting that property, has effectively contributed a substantial portion of the cost, if they were to buy that home.

Sir, it was to that end that this Administration took the bold step and acted immediately on assuming office, to make available to persons in our housing estates, those Government houses rented from the National Housing Corporation, who had long-term tenancy. The details, of course, are known. We have also heard, on several occasions, the positive response of the persons who would have benefitted from that type of arrangement and who continue to benefit.

Mr. President, it is clear then that we are on our way to ensuring that we make adequate provision for our population. If I could say something specifically before I link this initiative to some broader initiatives, if I could go specifically to the Amendment to the Value Added Tax Act, this 2009 amendment Bill seeks to provide for relief, as I said, from the Value Added Tax paid on a house up to a value of $150 000. Sir, the VAT is Value Added Tax on its materials.

Sir, to ensure that there is ease of application, that converts - based on the estimated and the average cost of building materials - into a 7 per cent rebate on the total cost of the house that translates into approximately $10 000 rebate.

Sir, what this is providing for is that a person who has purchased a house up to a maximum value of $150 000 can, through the processes set out in the legislation, seek to get a refund of Tax up to a tune of about $10 000. You can then, in the context of looking at a house valued at $150 000, recognise the significant tax benefits that this piece of legislation affords the homeowner.

In fact, if you think about it, if it is a new house first-time owner, that persons can go to some significant degree to financing the furnishing of that house. I believe that this measure alone is a significant one, which cannot and should not be ridiculed in any way. I also want to say, Sir, that it is part of a step wise process.

There was a promise to offer VAT relief up to $400 000, but I would want to hasten to say, Mr. President, that any honest Government, any Government that is reasonable and responsible, recognises that promises have to be delivered in a manner that is overall beneficial to the economy. Sir, the impact on the Treasury has to be looked at because it is a commitment which will see the unfolding of that. It is a commitment that recognises that the area of most need, in respect of housing, is at the very bottom tier of house prices and for those persons who fall at the lower ends of the scale.

Sir, it is to that end that among the criteria for which potential homeowners would have to meet, is one in which the gross annual family income does not exceed $42 000. I believe that as we look at the various conditions, these are conditions which would allow the individual family or the individual seeking to benefit, to access this in a reasonable manner. It is also a stipulation within the legislation that the person has the ability to claim within two years of the date of completion of the dwelling house. Therefore that process allows the person to claim, and it gives them a good window of time within which to facilitate their claims.

Sir, in looking at that policy, I want to stress that as we look to build a housing stock, as we look to support the efforts to acquire a housing stock, this Government recognises, as I said before, that social policy, the social welfare, the social well-being, the economic well-being, of course, of this nation, has to be driven by the economic and social well-being of its people. If we focus on issues outside of those people, we are setting up ourselves for a situation where the country stands to frustrate its efforts to grow, and let me expand on that, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I want to go back to this issue and look at it in relation to this notion of the economic value of land. Sir, for years, we heard that we should focus on getting that best economic value. To that end, we saw the transformation of aspects of Barbados into the provision of luscious, luxurious villas and condominiums. Sir, those condominiums and villas have to be maintained, and they have to be kept in pristine condition, et cetera, by a work force.

Mr. President, when we look perhaps at the income levels, the salaries paid to gardeners, maids, butlers, cooks, or even to the persons who are charged with the property maintenance, and matters of that sort, we are talking about a person who has to leave the luxurious surroundings of those villas to go home, somewhere.

I remember some time ago, Mr. President, speaking to one of my colleagues in Government, who was at the time building his home. He was not in Government at the time. He said to me, you know I feel terrible when I drop home the guys who are working on my house. Here I have masons, carpenters, et cetera, who want to build a home for themselves and I am feeling almost powerless about it, because they can get together and assist each other in building their homes, but they cannot get land at a decent price. This was maybe three or four years ago.

Sir, what this is saying is that when those builders build the lovely houses, when they service the beautiful gardens of locals as well as persons in those gated communities,... Can you think of the impact that working in those environments would have if a maid, a butler, or a gardener cannot go home to some place, put a key in the door and say: "I have a place of my own to go to. A place that is not leaking and where the floor boards are not dropping out; however modest, it is clean, it is tidy and it is mine."?

Mr. President, I believe that is the kind of objective we have in mind, to be able to facilitate the acquisition of a home, however modest.

11.40 p.m.

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN: To do that, we had to address the distortions in the situation which created challenges for thousands and thousands of Barbadians. It was a situation where people were frustrated over and over again. Sir, if Government did not take a clear policy decision and started to deliver, we would have had problems with our workforce. Mr. President, people talk about productivity or unacceptable levels of productivity as an issue that is falling into our workplaces. Mr. President, sometimes we have to step back from what we perceive to be the problem to recognise that what we may perceive as a problem is, in fact, the symptom of a fundamental underlying problem. Sir, if we are unable to address those at the root, we would continue to see problems.

Sir, when people seek to step out of their homes on mornings to go to work, whether it is in the public service, in the retail centre down town, in some fancy villa on the West Coast or in an apartment hotel somewhere on the South Coast, and they look at their workplaces, they need to feel proud knowing that they have left some place, however humble, that is theirs and that is in good condition so that they do not feel like a second or third-class citizens, but as somebody who has been able to find their rightful place and space within the landscape of this country by having their piece of the rock where, in fact, they can be proud to call their home and, by extension, be proud to call Barbados their home.

Sir, it is anticipated that as we address those critical needs of housing, we would see a change in the attitude of the people who have been out there frustrated for years. Sir, I like to use examples. There is a lady who works as a maid in my neighbourhood. She used to pass my house very often. I remember when she was contemplating purchasing a unit in the Haynesville area in the St. James South Constituency where I live, she spoke to me about the whole business of financing it and so on under the previous arrangement. Sir, one day she came and knocked on my door and said: "I want to tell you that I got my letter saying that I could now own the home." She had been living in it for over 20 years and she had qualified. She told me that she had already painted it and done some repairs. Sir, there was a pride and, if I might say so, a pep in her step when

she left. That is no exaggeration. Sir, she recognised that she had been paying rent for over 20 years.

Sir, Barbadians are house proud people and we need to recognise that we have to facilitate that. Sir, what that translated into for her is that she has something she could now give to her son. Sir, she also realised and articulated the fact that she is now able to take what she paid in rent in the past and put it towards some savings to help her son - who was now becoming a young adult - to try to do what she was finally able to do, that is, to acquire a piece of property.

Sir, when we look at these kinds of savings, as is the case with the VAT amendment and this proposal to give that refund, we are also providing the beneficiaries and their dependents with a basis for having a start in one of several ways. Sir, a $10 000 rebate can constitute for an adult member of a family a down payment on a piece of land or a down payment on a house. Sir, once they get their house, they can apply for a rebate. Sir, this is a ripple effect. The economists would have a nice fancy term for that.

Mr. President, what we really see is an initiative which can generate myriad positive responses. Sir, it falls squarely within a commitment to taking along those in this community who need some help.

Mr. President, I talked about the connection between that and work. When we look at the implications for a parent who has been able to save bus fares... I tell people I come from a philosophy of cooperation, the credit union movement. Those who know me otherwise would tell you that I dedicated half my life trying to spread that philosophy and make it work.

Sir, I believe that when Barbadians start to look at these savings and at the savings which accrue from not having to pay bus fares for their children who are able to ride free on the bus and things of this nature, they can find themselves seeking to accumulate, in a very serious way, resources to continue this quest to acquire a piece of Barbados or to invest in all other kinds of areas. Sir, it is important that we see the benefits of this.

Mr. President, we cannot divorce the question of a housing policy from other kinds of policies. This Government has sought to ensure, through its commitment to education, I just gave an example, a desire, a will and a commitment to ensuring that we have a solid workforce.

Mr. President, I have to stress that point because Barbados must first and foremost belong to Barbadians. Mr. President, we have to feel so. We cannot only say that we have to demonstrate it. We have to show very tangible ways to Barbadians that this is the case. Mr. President, we have facilitated the question of home ownership. We have facilitated education and we will continue to facilitate education.

The issue of health is one in which I can tell you, Mr. President, that the Minister of Health, his Cabinet colleagues and the entire Government is committed to remedying a lot of these wrongs. Mr. President, as we equip people to own their own home, et cetera, we have to ensure that there is provision for the occupants of those homes. We often find in low income, Barbadian homes multi-generational families. That is basically mother, grandmother, grandfather, children, grand children, et cetera.

Mr. President, as we look to the question of families, we cannot only provide physical accommodation, we also have to speak to the business of accommodating their other kinds of needs. In looking at the proposals and the plans for our communities, one of our commitments, which would be facilitated by a measure such as this, is to provide what we call housing communities where people are able to have dedicated recreational spaces, shopping facilities where individuals within the same community can operate their own business, perhaps, and day care facilities.

Mr. President, day care facilities, as we conceptualise them, must go beyond the provision of care for children. We all recognise that Barbados is an aging society when we look at the distribution of our population, so there must be provision for day care for the elderly as well. Mr. President, the best place to facilitate that is within the communities.

Mr. President, when we look at a housing policy, it has to be seen within the broader framework of a policy to address the needs of the people who live in those houses to bring back a sense of community to the neighbourhoods; therefore, there is a plan to get people involved back into the communities, to recognise that we must look after each other, that we must know the condition of our neighbours and that we must take a collective responsibility for the upbringing of our children. That is not new. That is a tradition from our ancestors.

11.50 a.m.

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN: We believe that unless we foster those things, unless we focus on those things, we cannot address issues of poor attitude in schools or at the workplace. Those things are influenced, to a large extent, by the “pressure” that we are able to bring to bear on each other as we seek to set standards of behaviour of what it means, of citizenship, et cetera.

Sir, all of these things are tied in. We cannot dismiss them and say let us focus on making Barbados an economic

giant, so to speak, because economic success is built on social success. It is also built on building the spirituality of our people, of committing to family. The macro variables are very much influenced by the variables which start at the individual, the family, and community levels.

Mr. President, as we look at these policies of facilitating home ownership and land acquisition, we are doing this while being mindful of the role and place such policies played within the broader framework of building a Barbados in which the average Barbadian feels that he or she is included; where the average Barbadian knows, by very concrete indicators, that he or she is included in the society as an equal partner. One who can stand and say proudly that he or she is a Barbadian and that they will continue to support the growth of this country because they are not being marginalised and made to feel that they have little to contribute, or that their efforts are being taken, but that in return, nothing is given back to them. We could only succeed if we do that.

Mr. President, I remember some time ago sitting in a meeting in another place when I was involved as an alumna of the University of the West Indies, where somebody made the point in relation to the issue of support for the institution. There was a proposal in terms of getting people involved in that process of philanthropy. Sir, a case was made that we have a country that is extremely attractive to others but unless we work to address the variables or factors which create that attractiveness, we stand probably to destroy the very thing that has made it attractive. Sir, in other words, Barbados is attractive because they say the people are courteous, friendly and progressive in their thinking.

Sir, people say Barbados is also conservative but there are benefits to conservatism. Law and order fall from being conservative. We are conservative in the right ways. We are also very liberal in other kinds of ways. Sir, that is fine too, but the point made was that as we look at the society and seek to sell the beauty of this society to others, as we seek to make it available to others, we stand to create problems for ourselves if we do not first make all those beautiful things available to Barbadians.

Mr. President, I believe it is critical that we accept that and that we translate it into very concrete evidence of support. I believe when we look at this piece of legislation to be amended, that as we start by providing for a rebate on VAT to first-time homeowners of properties valued at $l50 000 or less. We are saying to those Barbadians that they matter, that their condition and circumstances of living are important to us and that we have to take care of their needs. If they, in turn, are to take care of the needs of their families, of persons who live around them, their employers and of those who visit this country.

Mr. President, I believe it does not take much to convince my Honourable Senators or the public that this initiative is one of major significance, particularly as it falls within the parameters of a broader package of mechanisms, incentives or programmes to support all Barbadians.

I have talked about this specific initiative, but I also want to say that in all of these things there is a group of persons, the middle income Barbadians, who are often forgotten. It is believed that they too must - and it is part of the plan - make sure that they have access to housing and that they can retain that housing. To that end, part of the whole package of the housing initiative is a programme to identify, within large residential areas, those lots that are still available and make them available. Everybody does not necessarily need to have a rebate. Those who may and can afford to build houses of greater cost simply may want to access a piece of the land.

Mr. President, as I said before, I live in the constituency of St. James South. Sir, if you were to drive through those areas of Wanstead, Oxnards or Husbands Heights, you would identify parcels of land that are owned by the National Housing Corporation (NHC) which are amenable to being subdivided and made available.

I know it is part of the initiative of this Government to ensure that more parcels of land are made available. I believe that as we seek to address the specific needs of various sectors of the population, the lower income, first-time homeowners, young couples, elderly people, that we should be able to come up with a judicious mix of housing and property solutions and programmes to address those things.

Mr. President, I made reference to the situation of the elderly and Barbados as a changing society is one in which we are seeing individuals maturing into old age, getting ready to retire or retiring, who may not have, as my late parents did, a large number of children. There are persons who may be childless, or who may have had children who would have predeceased them. There may be persons whose children live outside of Barbados, or even in Barbados, who may be living on their own. There is consideration in our Manifesto for the concept of a reversed mortgage. That, as a model, is one which would allow the elderly homeowner to take advantage of the equity that he or she has in a house.

Mr. President, let us imagine a situation where an elderly gentleman or somebody like myself, as I plan my retirement far down the road, look to the fact that you may have a three-bedroom house that is not necessarily where you might want to live out your elderly years, or that it does not make sense economically to do so. What is proposed is a plan to allow that person to access the equity over time, so that by the end of the day, you are able to

adequately take care of yourself, as we say, between now and when we step out of the departure lounge into that other glorious life - I presume it is.

Sir, at the end of the day, we have put together and we are delivering on a set of programmes and initiatives to ensure that we address the fundamental and basic needs of Barbadians; a place to call his or her own so that at the end of the day we could send people out into the world, whether it is a world of recreation or a world of work, knowing that they are comfortable and could look anyone in the face and say that they are Barbadian, that they have been able to get their fair share or their start in owning something, rather than having to wonder what would happen at the end of the day; why is it that they are working in this lovely property but have nowhere to call their own.

Mr. President, I believe it is clear that the initiative to offer this VAT rebate is one of significant importance.

12:00 noon.

Sir, this Value Added Tax rebate is one of significant importance. It is one, when taken along with all the other initiatives undertaken by this Government so far and those planned, that Barbadians would again feel proud and that Barbadians would again be in a position to say these fields and hills. Sir, we all know what our National Anthem says, that we have been able to have a fair stake in what we are able to do.

Mr. President, with those words I recommend this amendment to you, Sir. I am obliged.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Senator Symmonds.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, I want to begin by assuring all present and within earshot that there is no substantial issue taken by the Opposition with respect to the concept of offering VAT relief, especially when it comes to those at the lower end of the economic ladder. Sir, to put it in blunt language, the idea of offering VAT relief to working-class people, or first-time homeowners who come from the lower economic level of the society is something that the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) would not take issue with or could not take issue with. However, what we do take some issue with...

Asides.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: I could best explain it by using the language of the Leader of Government Business in This Place herself. We take issue with the words of the Leader of Government Business. Sir, I was careful to write what she was saying as she spoke it. She said that responsible Governments require that promises be couched in a manner which is responsible and in keeping with the country's capacity for economic stability.

Mr. President, not that we take issue with the idea that a promise should be couched in a manner that is responsible. What we take issue with is when promises are made in a manner that is not responsible or, as the distinguished Leader of Government Business herself would say, not in keeping with the country's capacity for economic stability. Mr. President, that is what we take issue with.

Mr. President, perhaps the point of divergence, if there is to be one in this debate, is that one cannot realistically look at this, the first significant housing Bill, which comes from this Government, a 14-month-old Government, couched at it is, by the Leader of Government Business in the context of a broad strategy. She described it as part and parcel of the Government's ongoing commitment to housing Barbadians and expression of the philosophical commitment. Sir, I like the Leader of Government Business's language, if nothing else. She said there is a philosophical commitment to ensuring that there is a roof over the head of every Barbadian.

Mr. Speaker, this is how the Bill comes and how it is couched by the Leader of Government Business, but one cannot simply digest the rhetoric and look at the Bill before you in a manner which is completely divorced from any reflection on what transpired 14 months ago, two years ago or even three years ago, because it is all part of a continuum hopefully aimed at the development of the economy and the society of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, it was the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) that made very heavy, in my view then and in my view now, unfortunate weather about the state of housing in Barbados creating an impression that virtually zero had transpired in the course of 14 years of Barbados Labour Party (BLP) rule, insofar as it came to what the Leader of Government Business would call the philosophical commitment to provide a roof over the head of every Barbadian. It created the impression that hardly any housing solutions or if you wish to use the language of the now Prime Minister, when he was the Leader of the Opposition, 50 odd housing solutions in the course of 14 years. These were the almost absurd type of postulations that have been thrown around Barbados. We cautioned then, as we caution now, that serious politics cannot be about making absurd charges because a responsible Government is neither about absurd charges from the Opposition, nor is it from absurd and unmanageable, unreachable, unrealisable promises from a Party hoping to gain the reigns of Government.

Mr. President, I embrace wholeheartedly the concerns expressed by the Leader of Government Business and I only have one regret to utter. Sir, that is, perhaps it would have been good if she could have restrained others on her side, who I believe may not have been on her side then because I do not think she had taken any side.

Asides.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, please rescue me. Senator Alleyne, I am hearing his voice, but I am sure you are hearing, Sir.

Mr. PRESIDENT: It is clear that your hearing is better than mine.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Sir, we could discuss ways to assist you at the luncheon interval. Mr. President, it would have been a good thing if a voice of restraint had come from the Opposition's Benches then because what was put abroad in this country is deeply unfortunate, if not downright untrue.

Sir, before I go to the substance of that which is in the Order Paper before us, I want to speak a bit to the record because, as I have said to you, one could not seriously take issue with the idea of granting Value Added Tax to those at the lower end of the ladder, if one understood and was prepared to have understood that it was the Barbados Labour Party which introduced to this country a Housing Incentive Act.

Mr. President, the Act applied to the development of houses in developments of 15 houses of more, and that those developments were granted the treatment of the Special Incentives Act, which basically meant (1) there was a Value Added Tax refund on building materials, (2) that no import duty or excise taxes on imports were to be applied, and (3) a 15 per cent corporate tax on profits of construction companies and developers.

Mr. President, the reality, therefore, is that it was a Barbados Labour Party concept that we are now seeing crystalised in this Value Added Tax reduction. Sir, even as we see it being crystalised here, a sense of decency would cause Honourable Members on the Oher Side, I am sure, to recall that when the idea was advanced by the Democratic Labour Party, it was not on houses valued at $100 000 or $150 000 for tax relief; it was about $400 000.

Sir, I want to use the language of the Leader of Government Business. I am so attracted to it that I will repeat it again that responsible Governments required promises to be couched in a manner that was reasonable. Mr. President, the reasonableness of the day was that you told the public that on $400 000, if your house was valued at that or less, you would get the Value Added Tax relief. Sir, there was no suggestion that it was going to be a rebate of 7 per cent. The Value Added Tax was going to be free housing and, Sir, there were going to be tax free houses. Sir, that is what people were made to understand up and down Barbados.

Mr. President, therefore, there has been what the Americans call a "flip-flopping" taking place.

12.10 p.m.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: You commit yourselves to one thing today and you offer the reverse tomorrow. I am not going to take issue with the substance of the idea because, as I said, it finds its genesis in a Housing Incentive Act that was enacted by the Barbados Labour Party while we were in Government, and committed to a refund on building materials in much the same way that this Act does, but for the exception that there was no marriage of convenience whereby you only got back a piece of the VAT. You got back all and the breach of a social contract.

The breach of a social contract, the vulgarity in public affairs, and the intellectual dishonesty in public affairs comes about in this regard when the public is now being asked to accept that a promise has been honoured, when really and truly you are coming in at a lower level, in terms of the value of the houses that people expected and were led to believe they would receive.

Secondly, the level of rebate is one-half that which the Government, when it was in Opposition, committed itself. That is the distinction and it is a distinction in fact, a distinction in kind, a distinction in quality, a distinction in content and it redounds to the discredit of the Government, not a word by way of explanation.

We are left to infer, because we are all people of goodwill, that this Government meaning well, will one day reach the point where they will honour the $400 000 pledge of a full Value Added Tax rebate, but we also know the reality of this Government and pledge, so we tread cautiously.

Asides.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Sir, I hope your hearing improves because there is a buzzing.

Mr. President, I make the caveat against false promises because it really is the crux of the difficulty that we have on This Side. The incitement of empty public expectation is an almost certain recipe for what may ultimately become the regrettable scenario of violent social unrest and unmitigated disaster. Those of us who are in public life have to consciously guard against this tendency

in the direction of inciting empty public expectation. In short, you tell the public you can give them something when you know deep in your breast, and your heart, that there is no serious likelihood of a capacity to deliver.

Sir, the policy of the Government thus far on the question of housing, I must tell you I take some issue with the expression of the Leader of Government Business, this concept of a broad strategy may well be true but I see no commitment. I see rather a lukewarm, lack-lustre and incoherent performance thus far.

We have to be very mindful of what allowed Honourable Senators on That Side to be sitting on Government Benches in the Senate, the commitments, you would not hear a voice but I am hearing a voice saying it bothers me. I am comfortable with the people. My heart is not troubled but I feel, however, that we must at all stages be mindful of the commitment given by the Leader of the Opposition in his speech to the House of Assembly, Leader of the Opposition then, in 2007, in his reply to the Budget in 2007.

Sir, it was at that time the Leader of the Opposition, as he then was and Prime Minister today, broke ground for the first time, publicly, on matters relating and very germane to this housing debate. The Leader of the Opposition said then, and I am quoting from a copy of the Hansard. It is obviously a document of the House because, as he spoke, it would have been written into the Hansard. At Page 5:

"Well today, I am saying to Barbadians at home and abroad that within 90 days of being elected the Government of this country, a Democratic Labour Party Administration, will introduce a policy of zoning certain lands for exclusive Barbadian purchase..."

Sir, of course, the inference has to be drawn. You cannot seriously discuss housing of the country without also discussing the utilisation of land.

Sir, when I make the point about inciting empty public expectation, when the Leader of Government Business berated her own Prime Minister, seemingly so, then speaks about responsible Government requiring promises to be couched in a manner that is reasonable, we are speaking precisely of these types of commitments, that within 90 days of being elected a Government, you will introduce a policy of zoning certain lands for exclusive Barbadian purchase. The inference could be drawn then and now is, that Barbadians and Barbadians alone, because that is the meaning of the word exclusive, would be able to benefit under this zoning policy that has not yet seen the light of day.

Barbadians would be able to benefit from the exclusive right to purchase lands within the specified zone, hence making the difficulty in acquiring a house disappear almost miraculously; a sudden transformation and a sudden transmogrification of the housing problems in the country, in empty incitement of public expectation, but no delivery. It is precisely of that the Leader of Government Business speaks.

Sir, the Prime Minister now, and Leader of the Opposition then, continued:

"Additionally, a Democratic Labour Party Administration will make it compulsory that all land for sale in major developments be advertised inclusive of the asking price on the local market, prior to promotion and sale to non Barbadians. Proof of advertising must be supplied when applying for a transfer to a non Barbadian interest."

Therefore, as a condition precedent, as a point before you can do anything else, if you are going to sell land in Barbados in a major development, you had to promote it here on the local market. The inference is, Barbadians first and foremost. We almost hear the boast of the Leader of the Opposition in the Other Place speak through the mouth of the Leader of Government Business today.

Sir, it is incredible. It is one set script, but the difficulty is, that as with much drama, you have a script, but at the end of the day, you all go on and the performance is over. There is no delivery above exit stage left. The reality is, today in 2009, after having been elected in January 2008, we are at a situation where developments in this country can take place, and land in Barbados can be advertised for sale and the solemn pledge, the empty incitement of public expectation continues. The solemn pledge that you would have to first and foremost give Barbadians prior knowledge, that does not take place in this country. Yet this was the commitment on which people were asked, I almost said to roll a dice, but I do not think that would be fair. That would impute that the people of Barbados gambled when they elected the Government. I do not think anybody gambled or that they would gamble.

The reality is we can continue. As I said it is almost impossible in this country, seriously, to speak to the question of housing without, at the same time, looking at the whole land use situation. That is why I am very keen on embracing the principle contained in this debate, of making life a little easier financially, because you said the cost of living was job number one, job number two and job number three of this regime, and the cost has only gone upwards. As recently as today the bottled gas has gone up too.

12.20 p.m.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Sir, the reality is that if you can take a little VAT relief and help a small man, I am all for it. As I said, it was part of a Barbados Labour Party initiative. The reality is as well that there was a broader canvass against which we have to look at the ability to utilise our land and to house our people.

One of the things that was noised abroad by the then Opposition and now Government was this whole question of the tendency. Sir, you can only describe it as a tendency, because if people throw something out there and you repeat it often enough, and in the words of the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, they will believe it.

The reality is, Sir, that you repeat it often enough that the land in Barbados, which is agricultural land, is being taken out of production and given or sold to wealthy investors from abroad, and the people of Barbados are being denied their patrimony. Sir, that is the mantra you hear and it is believed.

The cure for that cancer, Mr. President, was that within 100 days, and the same speech of the Leader of the Opposition back in 2007, long before the Manifesto was drafted...

Asides.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: All of it is contained in here. In the first 100 days we will introduce an Agriculture Protection Act that will require a two-thirds majority of both Houses of Parliament for change of use of any area of more than 2 acres of land.

Sir, the sudden slump in the shoulders of the Minister of Agriculture here present, and the sudden change in his demeanour, suggest that he would prefer me to make him more comfortable by not speaking to this issue at length. Sir, I will not make him uncomfortable, Sir, because he has done me no wrong personally.

Mr. PRESIDENT: I am very certain that the Honourable Senator knows that the only person he can address when making a speech in this Chamber is the Chair. The Minister of Agriculture happens to be a Senator, but he is not in the Chair at the moment.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: I am guided, as always, I would be, but I do not think I was addressing him. I was addressing you, Sir, and telling you that I noted a slump in his shoulder and a change in his demeanour. Sir, I was trying to draw to your attention that as I was looking at you and speaking to you, I saw the inescapable slump of his shoulders and a posture of dejection overcame his persona.

Asides.

Senator K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, we move on because that would be to spend a lot of time on a matter that is not that important.

The truth is, Sir, the excitement of public expectation and just as the Leader of the Opposition then, Prime Minister now, took a posture of saying he would put in this special zoning policy to protect the Barbadian patrimony within 90 days of being elected, in this regard, he gave himself 10 extra days. Sir, within 100 days, we will have this Agriculture Protection Act, requiring a constitutional entrenchment.

In the language of the Constitutional lawyers, the reason you have a two-thirds majority is because then you will have to have the equivalent of a constitutional entrenchment. The deepest level at which parts of the Constitution of Barbados are entrenched, is a two-thirds majority. It does not get any higher than that. Sir, important was it; so inescapable a priority was it. Nothing. No delivery.

Then, Mr. President, we come to the Bill before us and we are asked to believe that there is a broad strategy. Sir, when you talk about a strategy, we should be seeing component parts thereof. When you talk seriously about doing something to so protect the patrimony of the Barbadian public, we should be seeing the component parts thereof.

Mr. President, at every turn that you go to examine that which the Democratic Labour Party committed itself to when it was hot in the pursuit of the electoral favour and pleasure, you know that all those pledges... Sir, if it was a traditional old-fashioned Barbadian man-woman relationship, you know that she would fire him by now, because you promised nothing and you delivered little. Happily, Sir, a little bit more time will be granted to this Government.

Mr. President, you could go on and on. What is particularly troublesome, Sir, is in the question of the actual placement of shelter over the heads of the Barbadian community. Mr. President, I do not think that it is now just simply a question of broken promises. It is a question of under performance and a serious failure to embrace opportunity.

I said in this House before, during the Estimates debate last year - and that was our first debate of this Chamber - that one of the things that disturbed me was that the Estimates were prepared and presented in such a way that it made it physically impossible for the Government, unless it was going to come back for massive Supplementaries.

I took the point then to reflect on distinguished Senator Boyce's commitment that he wanted to run a very small fiscal deficit; that I did not see how it would be possible to honour the pledges which had been made with respect to housing Barbadians, especially in the context of building terrace units and National Housing Corporation units.

In the same speech to which I referred, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition then in 2007, he is Prime Minister now - he got his wish - he committed that a Democratic Labour Party Government would provide 2 000 other housing solutions per year, in the first term of a Democratic Labour Party Government, and these will include rental units, terrace units and starter homes.

As a first priority, he says, we will build and maintain a pool of rent-to-purchase units for low-income earners, pensioners and the disabled who may not qualify for mortgages and loans. We will establish housing communities for low income earners, including all the amenities.

Again, we heard it all repeated here today, by the Leader of Government Business, this lovely idea of the day nursery, pharmacy, mini mart and all of that. Sir, we will also promote starter home projects, with private sector companies, in which Barbadians can build, live and explore the long tradition in Barbados. Mr. President, within the first year, we will waive taxes of purchase on property by first-time homeowners.

Mr. President, we went through an Estimates debate. We came in July and we had a Budget debate. Mr. President, we had fireside chats, so-called, I do not know what is the correct description of them. A Prime Minister came on the television, armed with the presence of one of his most able intellects in the Cabinet, Senator Boyce, and he changed the energy costing profile in the country, at the stroke of a pen.

Therefore, when you wanted, you could tinker with the economy, but you made a firm commitment to the electorate of Barbados that within the first year, you would provide a waiver on taxes on purchase of property by first time homeowners and it is not done.

When you have your first housing debate, the crisis of confidence arises. The glaring failure on the part of the Leader of Government Business is that there is no explanation for the gaping loophole, but you get up to speak on policy and say that it is part of a broad strategy, but the strategy which had been outlined prior to your being empowered by the people, is left found wanting, naked, gone a begging. Sir, the same thing with regard to NHC rental units and lots, where 20-year-plus tenants, shall own units and lots on payment of legal expenses.

12.30 p.m.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: This one has always tickled me because we had, for a brief flirtation early in the course of last year, the sorry spectacle of a suited Minister of Housing running up and down Haynesville and other places in Barbados with papers in his hand, akin to the postman delivering mail, saying that he had come to give the occupiers their documents which would allow them to know that they, after 20 years, having languished, would now become property owners.

Mr. President, what this Government has not said or has not come clean to the people of Barbados about is that within 90 days, not even 100 days of the commencement of that policy, it came to a sudden and screeching halt.

Sir, today, if you were living in a housing unit - I use you, Sir, as an example - and your time of 20 years came up today, and you were to present yourself before the said Minister, the National Housing Corporation, or any component part thereof, nothing would happen to help you because the policy came to an end.

Mr. President, I do not mind them ending it because we all knew, those of us who were seriously looking at the economic circumstances of the country, that if you were going to do it, you would be doing it for a very brief period of time and so, therefore, at best it was not a policy. It was more in the form of a gimmick.

Sir, what I detest, I put it as high as that, as being a despicable betrayal of the public's trust is that when you end the policy, you are not man enough or woman enough to come and say I have ended the policy and it has been ended for the following reasons.

Mr. President, I am going to hear, no doubt, in this debate that some people managed to get conveyances, but many more are still waiting too. Mr. President, I am not concerned about that part. I am concerned about the fact that you begin a public policy - by definition public policy has therefore to serve a public purpose and a public good - therefore if you have changed your perception on what is the public good, if you are going to say that 90 days after naming the policy and beginning the policy you are going to end the policy, then you must equally tell the people why you have ended it or, at least, that it has come to an end. At least the decency would be that it has come to an end.

Mr. President, they should not leave people out there pregnant with expectation that if they become eligible as a 20-year tenant tomorrow morning that they could find themselves at the National Housing Corporation to get the assistance that they believe they are entitled to get, to hear all of a sudden now that assistance does not exist anymore

because we ended it, but we did not get around to telling you that we ended it.

Mr. President, for the purpose of gaining public glory and praise, you ran about in the hot sun telling me that you had become the policy, so that is the issue.

Asides.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: I heard sotto voce, you cannot hear, Sir, that it will be continued just before the next election. Sir, that does not surprise me, but again, that only illustrates the level of contempt that some people on the Government Side have for the public and the public's well-being. Mr. President, you do not just tinker around with a policy that is supposed to be for the public good purely for electoral and vote winning purposes. For those who are saying that, and you cannot hear it, Sir, I feel deeply ashamed for them.

Mr. President, I go further. The Leader of the Opposition then, Prime Minister now, said that National Housing Corporation tenants for less than 20 years will get interest free loans to purchase units or lots. I am going to say it again slowly because I want you to understand the level to which this Government has gone in abandoning the people. The now Prime Minister said that National Housing Corporation tenants for less than 20 years will get interest-free loans to purchase their unit or lot.

Sir, even if you had ended the policy or even when you ended the policy, the very least that you could do is to come and tell the people that you ended it because it was not sustainable and to tell you the truth we should have told you at the beginning it was not sustainable, but we could still help you with an interest-free loan to purchase the unit. Sir, not a fellow has benefitted in Barbados today from such a loan or such a lot.

Mr. President, what then makes this whole thing very vulgar is that we are going to be told that this is a philosophical commitment to place roofs over the heads of every Barbadian. The question that people out there would be asking - I am not going to ask it because I certainly have my own view of Honourable and distinguished Senators and Members of the Other Place - is how could we be treated this way? Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no goodwill? Is there no sense that at a moral minimum you could at least explain to us why you have abandoned us this way? That is the question people would be asking of this Democratic Labour Party.

Mr. President, I take no pleasure of having to address the Chamber in this tone, but the reality is that is what it is. I did not make the facts for myself. If I could have made them, I would not have made them in this disgraceful way. I would not want to have to stand in any circumstances, one year and two months after the election of a brand new Government with fresh legs and hopefully fresh spirit, to speak about them in this debilitating way. It is one of the bigger tragedies of modern times in this country.

Mr. President, in contradistinction, we had a Barbados Labour Party position, which was, in fact, all that the Honourable Leader of Government Business is trying now to marry herself to with regard to the Government broad strategies...

Asides.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, I hope that the Honourable Leader of Government Business does not take the language 'marry herself' personally and literally.

The fact of the matter, Mr. President, is that under a Barbados Labour Party Government, we understood clearly that there was a multifaceted approach to the issue of housing. One of the first things we did was to take on board the entire country who were already property owners and encourage them to understand that their home was an investment.

Sir, the best way in which you could help a people protect their investment and develop on their investment by further investment was by helping remove the tax burden. Sir, an onerous land tax system which had existed in this country for a long time was radically transformed under the Barbados Labour Party. It was the Barbados Labour Party who introduced the concept of a property owner not paying land taxes on his house if the land was valued at $125 000 or less. Mr. President, that took 19 000 Barbadian brothers and sisters off of the land tax role giving them increased disposable income; an opportunity to better maintain their homes.

Mr. President, I said in this Chamber as recently as last week that part of the economic development of our people has to be encouraging them to understand how to manage investments. One of the things we have in this country that we must cry shame on is the amount of people who even after they become property owners, in the closing chapter of their lives have to go cap in hand to Government to beg for a little help to fix a roof and so on.

Mr. President, you give people a little more money back in their pocket that you can better protect your investment. We carried it up to $150 000. Even when you are protecting the investment, what did we see?

The Honourable Leader of Government Business talks about St. James South. Let us talk about St. James South. We saw in Wanstead and West Terrace people who

own one house then being able to invest in another piece of property. I know of a property owner who purchased a second house in Bagatelle in St. James Central after having owned the first one in West Terrace because of the fact that they had additional disposable income. That house was then part of a rental pool in this country, further advancing the issue of accommodating our Barbadian people.

The reality is that we have on the alternative, the Democratic Labour Party's approach.

12.40 p.m.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, the wise men and women of the Democratic Labour Party sought not to continue with a revenue neutral tax policy and land tax, as we had, but what they do? They introduced, as recently as last year, a land tax policy which now is tied to a regrading of the values of properties, in such a way that you do not amend the bands so as to give people a little latitude; you do not ease the quantum of the tax take so as to give people a little tax break, but what has happened is that if a fellow now in the last cycle, when properties were revalued...

Mr. President, I have had people coming to my chambers to ask for assistance; in some instances they want to write for a little relief; in some instances they want to know what are their options. Sir, believe it when I say to you that there are people who, after the reevaluation of properties in this country have even had to contemplate forced sales because of the fact that they could not pay the land tax. Sir, when a $250 000 house becomes a house valued $750 000, where that home owner is paying taxes on the $750 000 value, then there is a problem for the people. It is a cost of living exercise. It impacts on the very issue of housing the people that you say are your first and foremost philosophical commitment.

Asides.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, I am hearing a sotta voce argument about who I should 'buse' and do not 'buse', as though 'busing' is the solution to a problem which should be better dealt with, not by that conduct but, rather by cerebral effort on the part of the Government to say we have intellectualised the issue. We understand the pain of the people, we feel the plight of the people and we will therefore, make the following concessions.

Mr. President, no concessions have come and none is likely to come, so that a progressive land tax policy has been reversed to the effect that today in Barbados there are homes, which would have been valued at $l20 000 or $ll5 000 three years ago, and the owner of the home was not paying land tax but because of the change in evaluation and the failure of the Government to respond in a sensitive and passionate way to ease the pain, some of those people who were taken off the tax role are back on the role today. That is what I mean by not being a revenue neutral policy. That is what I mean by being an insensitive policy.

Sir, it is all very well and good for a government that is contented and fat with its election victory and feeling that it is insurmountable to continue this way, but as I say to you, we have to be very careful that the insensitivity and the false promises do not incite a level of angst and anger in the country to the point where one day we would deal with the unfortunate situation of serious social unrest and unmitigated disaster. We have to be eternally cautious of those things, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I am also going to say that the rental market to which I just referred was another area in which the Barbados Labour Party seriously tried to bring fresh and innovative policies. Sir, one of the things in my judgment that sold this country short, not only in the last General Election, but the public discourse in recent times - I am not going to tie it to election politics - is that we have not had people being prepared to put on the table all of the facts and to weigh them in the balance to see what was progressing and what was not. Sir, the propaganda machine was what took over in Barbados and that is always to the eternal detriment of a country when it happens that way.

Mr. President, we had a rental market which, in any logical assessment, is a critical component part in any shelter strategy in any country. Sir, you are going to always have rental accommodation. Sir, we amended the Income Tax Act - you do not hear the Government speak of this now - so as to give incentives both to the landlord and to give protection to the tenant, so that there would be a more equitable situation in this country, so that we could give more of an inclination to stimulate the rental sector in Barbados.

Mr. President, you do that because you know deep in your heart the alternative to doing it would be to stand up and making an empty promise about how you could build, as they say here, 2 000 National Housing Corporation units. You know the alternative to it would be an empty promise about providing 2 500 house spots in a year. You have, at some stage, to say what is the cost of saying these things when you know you cannot deliver, and in the alternative what might you do creatively to bring some measure of comfort, relief and solution to the problem. Therefore, in the critical rental market sector, the incentive to landlord and tenant to stimulate the rental sector was done via the Income Tax Act.

Mr. President, it also spawned another debate upon which the Government has remained absolutely silent since having been elevated to office. That debate was the

inescapable question of the conditions of the rental sector in Barbados. We said then, when we were in Government, that one of the things we wanted to do and were working on was to bring a fresh piece of legislation which would speak to the question of the condition in the rental sector in this country.

Mr. President, we committed ourselves in our Manifesto to ensuring that some of the basic things that accorded with human decency would find their place of necessity in Barbados - because you cannot just dangle the carrot in front the landlords if the landlords really wanted to be slumlords. Sometimes you have to use the big stick and whip them into line. Sir, we understood that it was a wrong thing for people in Barbados to be paying rent to a landlord and those people had to go outside and use a facility which was a hole dug in the ground.

Sir, we understood that people were paying money to landlords without having the basic amenities which should be taken for granted as a matter of course. The checks and balances were not there for the landlords. We introduced that in this country as part of the debate.

Sir, a new government is in for nearly one-and-a-half year and not a word has been heard from the Housing Minister on this vital question on the quality of rental housing accommodation out there and what is going to be done by this Government to ensure that basic minimum standards apply. And then I heard that there is this wonderful mosaic and a broad strategy to commit to housing Barbadians, but in what condition, Mr. President? It was the Barbados Labour Party that introduced a Housing and Neighbourhood Upgrading Programme, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, where $24 million was made available to the working-class of this country and the low-income earners of this country to help finance the purchase of affordable housing for those persons. Fourteen million dollars was negotiated with the Inter-American Development Bank towards the acquisition and development of primary homes.

Sir, we have a Housing Minister who pooh-poohs the Primary Homes Programme, who cannot get past the "Lady Bird", "Sparrow Bird", or whatever, that for him is titillating and exciting. For those on That Side it was election fodder. It served the idea of small things amusing small minds, as you went up to a critical period at General Election.

The reality is that you have come to a point where you have to govern and once you have committed to making $l4 million available to housing the low-income people, then what is the status of the programme today? It is a bad thing and a wrong thing for the Leader of Government Business to stand here and to go through an entire exercise in presenting us with the first major housing Bill of this Government and we cannot hear one word, not a word from her lips, as though it is an initiative that has never existed. It is a wrong thing.

Mr. President, it also was a government that provided subsidies to low-income families earning between $7 000 and $19 000 a year. Those subsidies were to assist people with the construction of their homes. That is why I cannot take issue with the substance of this Bill before us now because it equated to approximately $l0 000 being placed in the hands of a low-income family as a subsidy. It comes back to the same thing when you take 7 per cent of the VAT, you rebate it, and you come back to approximately $10 000.

1.00 p.m.

SENATOR K.D. SYMMONDS: The concept is not an original concept but what I have issue with, Mr. President, is the politics of hypocrisy; a politics that would say that a government came to office full of ideas; full of commitment and so much to deliver.

Sir, their soothsayers called in on the Call-in Programme and created the impression that the Minister was a miracle worker when they know well in their heart that when they came into Government they found at Coverley 179 houses in an advanced stage of completion.

Sir, at Deanes Town Heights they found 148 in an advanced stage of completion. Sir, having been built already at Grazettes, there were 42 houses and 41 houses were built at Old Deanes Town with sites and services put in.

Mr. President, what is it I am hearing about the Barbados Labour Party not having performed when at Airlie's Heights in St. Michael, 16 houses were built and were found there? Sir, I know of my own volition what took place in Hoyte's Village. The Leader of Government Business is applauding that and I thank her for it..

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN: Mr. President, on a point of order. I had no plan to interrupt the Honourable Senator but while he wants to find fictitious ways of trying to make a case for himself and his colleagues, who formed the previous Government, I wish he would not misrepresent me in any way in his discussions. I am not applauding anything. I am sitting and observing the process. Sir, today is the beginning of Lent, a period in which we reflect and I wish he would be honest and remember that it is 40 days of reflection and honesty.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Sir, I do not know that the word "honest" could continue to remain in the record. Sir, I have no quarrel with what the Leader of

Government Business said except for her use of the word "honest".

Mr. PRESIDENT: My understanding of what she said is that she hopes you would be honest. I cannot find anything particularly wrong with that expression of hope.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Very well, Sir. The substantive issue is that the work that the Democratic Labour Party would have come and found, work in train as at January 8, 2008, was one in which there was a total of 876 houses. Sir, those are the figures I got from the National Housing Corporation and, Sir, those are the figures that anybody could check with the National Housing Corporation and get. This has nothing to do with what has been done prior to 2007 and so on. Sir, this is what was in train at 2008.

Mr. President, let me help the distinguished Senators on the Other Side because I do not want them to misappreciate what I am saying. If they were to take the trouble of not listening to propaganda of their own making and believing it, but do some research, they would find that the records of the National Housing Corporation say that 2 519 housing solutions were created between 1994 and 2007. I thank the distinguished Senators for allowing me to read that into the record.

Mr. President, in addition, they would find that over $69 million was made available to workers, over 5 000 public servants in Barbados under the General Workers' Loan Fund. Sir, I go further and say that in addition to the 2 519, there was a further 800 properties which were in train when this new Government came to office. Sir, we have at some stage to get past the mirage that is being created and deal with the truth and the substance.

Mr. President, as the Leader of Government Business said, honesty is expected and wished upon in this season of Lent. Sir, I think there is nothing wrong in substance with this piece of legislation, which has come before us but I believe that, in its totality, it reflects a very micro part of what is expected to be the broad housing strategy of the Government. Sir, when the Government is viewed objectively, language found in the Scriptures, when people have been viewed objectively and placed in the scale, they are found wanting and, Sir, this Government is wanting.

Mr. President, I thank you for your indulgence.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Senator Trotman.

SENATOR SIR ROY TROTMAN: Mr. President, I rise to declare my support for the Bill that is before us particularly, since it allows me an opportunity not to deal in the history of the politics because I leave that to politicians, Sir, but because it allows me to make some observations regarding my own views about some of the issues which this kind of exercise should make working people aware of.

Mr. President, since I believe I can claim to have been very associated with your thinking, I believe that I can say that we were some of the older believers in the view that taxation should be of a progressive nature and that the man or woman who could most afford to contribute to the State for those measures which the State needs to be able to build a better society, that those areas and persons should be the ones who should bear the burden of that taxation.

Sir, that was in the days when we were willing to accept progressive, direct taxation. We were permitted by interests, which were not necessarily local, to take the view that was not the right approach to taxes for the development of a country and so we moved away from that to the application of a new kind of tax, the Value Added Tax, and the attendant tax policy.

Sir, I do not cry sour grapes because that has been. Sir, it was done with the best will. I have no doubt it was done because it was considered as the approach to be taken by those who were the geniuses of the day. Sir, I merely make the point, however, to indicate that all of us reading and watching should be aware that now the great gurus are now recognising the need for a new stimulus package to reestablish a community that could be stable enough to develop growth for all, those people are realising that we have to go back to a system where taxation is not placed, as it has been placed over the last 20 years on those least able to bear the burden, but where it is understood that there has to be a reversal, and that taxation should be taken off those vulnerable people and should be, in fact, placed on those who are better able to bear the burden of taxation.

Mr. President, I think you would find that in many of the leading countries of the world, there is a rethink going on about approaches to taxation. Of course, because in many of those countries there is a strongly entrenched interest that makes it difficult for Governments to move, it may not be as easy as it may be for other countries, where the level of free democracy is more easily to be seen and to be experienced.

Mr. President, that point I make as a background against which to say that although I am one of those who have reluctantly gone to the pond and accepted that I must treat of this new medicine of VAT, I am still very perfectly aware that it is not a tax system, with which I am perfectly at ease, even as we speak.

1.00 p.m.

SENATOR Sir Roy Trotman: There is no argument because of the history, but I believe that we ought to be

able to recognise that VAT is a taxation arrangement that penalises persons and the companies who are unable to meet their responsibilities by a given time. You may argue that there is nothing wrong with that. I would say that is true, but not always true.

If, for example, you run a company, as I do, in the case of UCAL, but that is merely in passing, the point has to be made for other companies. If your client is the Government in one of its statutory Boards or in any of the companies it has which has to rely on the Government, for the approval of revenues so you could get paid for the work that you do, then you may miss your VAT payment by the time that is required, the 15th of a given month.

It is proper that you should be punished because you would have failed to honour your commitment to the party with whom you have an agreement. There can be nothing wrong with that, but if you are in error for reasons which are not of your own doing, and if the person who punishes you is indeed responsible for the position in which you find yourself being unable to pay and to be within the Law, ought there not be some balance?

I am sure you remember the Prophet who appeared before David and asked him the very simple question, if the farmer raised the lamb, that was the very center of his eye, and if that lamb grew to a position of beauty and the landlord, somebody used the term before, came and took that lamb away, ought that thief and robber not to face the full punishment? David, always willing to see justice agreed, of course, that the person who stole the lamb should be punished and was thereupon ready with his sword of correction to punish the thief, until the Prophet said, "But David, you are that man."

Asides.

SENATOR SIR ROY TROTMAN: I speak to no one, Sir, but I do wish to make the point that if the Government that pays that company causes that company to delay in payment because the Government does not pay, so that the company itself can pay back the Government, must there be not some reparation?

Sir, I wish to make the point that this is a matter over which there has been very great agonising, certainly by this speaker, ever since 1997 and 2000 in particular, where everybody said, thou are just and thou are right in thy anger against this intemperate behaviour, but we have been told, yes you are right but no there is no solution.

I would wish that the occasion of this debate be taken to have this new Administration recognise that the point which I make from this position, is the point that several small and medium-sizes business persons, particularly, big ones too, but sometimes bigger companies are able to manage themselves because they have some fat that they could cushion themselves with, but those smaller businesses that are sometimes barely managing to meet their own cost by the month, these companies have a particular problem, but they do not have the opportunity and the privilege, which has been given to me, to be able to speak in such a way that we could reach the voice of those across from us who are hearing us, even though they may not be looking at us.

Sir, I wish today to make the point that if any company in this country has to pay VAT and it is being punished for not paying VAT that is proper, but if that company's major, and in some cases sole client, is a Government agency, as mine is, that has no other way of receiving revenue except through the same Government, then there has to be some examination of that issue.

Sir, I am saying that I am appealling to you now, but I have been appealling long before now, for more than 10 years. The problem with this is, when you owe you are penalised and the penalty gets higher and higher each time. So when you get caught, because you are small, you will find yourself in a position where your cost spirals beyond your capacity ever to reach your repaying position, but the Government, who is in fact your other party, pays you late but does not pay you a penalty. So you are eternally in the grip of the monster of repayment and your business is never able to get out from the clutches of debt.

Sir, I think I have said enough on the matter, but the matter has to be one that, as we specially at this time recognising the difficulties which Barbados is experiencing and we are trying to put together various forms of stimulus packaging, it has to be one of those things which the Government needs to look at with the private sector, especially small businesses, and for which there needs to be some form of remedy. I am sure that the business grouping, notwithstanding that my views sometimes are not their views on other issues, would be with me on this particular matter.

Sir, I think that the knock-on effect, which I have alluded to, is something that nobody should turn up their noses on, because I do not believe anybody should be unwilling to pay his or her tax obligations, but I do not believe that the Government of either Party ought to be a government which does not understand that balance equals justice, and that Government's intention has to be to bring justice to bear at all times.

Sir, this is not intended to be the intervention that matches the previous speaker for length, but I am sure that by the time I make two other comments for the consideration for the Minister's concern, I hope you would consider that it either equals or surpasses in terms of content.

Sir, the business of the rebate that goes up to $150 000 in housing everybody has accepted as not being such a bad idea, except that I have the view that it has a kind of cut-off element that causes me some degree of concern, and that therefore makes me want to make the following suggestion.

1.10 p.m.

SENATOR Sir Roy TROTMAN: Some people wish to have housing established, and they may not themselves be able to buy the house, so they may have to go to an institution that is assisting to put down housing. Sir, that institution may want to put down low cost housing but the concept that particular institution may have, may bring out the low cost housing, not below the $150 000, but above the $150 000.

A classic example of this - and I am not going to go too far from home - is the housing of the Barbados Workers' Union that we are putting up at Mangrove. Those are low cost houses, set out philosophically from the very outset, but they are going to cost more than $150 000. Sir, they are low-cost housing for persons who are supposed to be at the lower end of the earning ladder. Should those people be disqualified purely on the ground that they are first-time homeowners and work for a figure of $42 000 or less, or should we not have an arrangement, which I now propose. They ought to be given the VAT incentive up to the point of $150 000 and that they then be allowed to have the opportunity to use that particular benefit, which they know is coming to permit them to be able to get a house, and then to get their house.

In essence, Mr. President, housing is such a scarce commodity that there are very few people who are going to be able to get a house for less than $150 000. You have to take what you can get, so the mother will have to join with the son, and the father with daughter, in terms of arranging for housing, because you are going to have to put incomes together to be able to quality.

Sir, if that is so, then the only meaningful way by which we are going to be able to increase the housing stock, to address the building of more houses and to bring relief for our people in this country, is to apply the very sound arrangement for which both Parties want to take the credit. This will have to be dealt with by the politician, as to where the credit really lies. What I would want is to have the credit for the housing because I want to see houses and I want to see poor people being able to afford housing like anybody.

Asides.

SENATOR SIR ROY TROTMAN: Mr. President, there has to be a third element in the new arrangements. We have to bring Government officials, the private sector, new entrepreneurs and the Trade Union Movement into this new body of thinkers and to move them from being thinkers into becoming doers, to think of, but to do, to prepare to enact packages for stimulating this economy for the recovery.

Sir, if the Recovery Programme in as big a place as the United States of America has to do with housing, then all the more reason we should be concerned with making sure that housing is seen as an integral part of that same stimulus packaging in Barbados. Sir, in some discussions with a guy whose name cannot be called, we have worked out that a further proposal is for the Government and the private sector, generally, to consider the Trade Union Movement as a special collection of lower income workers in every case and to encourage the trade union movement to put its collective money into the housing stock development programme in this country, as part of the programme.

Asides.

SENATOR SIR ROY TROTMAN: I believe there are at least three unions which are ready to take off in this particular area. Mr. President, you are a member of one of those trade unions. Therefore, you have a right to be considered for some of the kudos which the colleagues have been gracious enough to pass.

Sir, if that is so, then the stimulus packaging which we are talking about has to be one that would allow this same VAT incentive application to apply to those particular unions, to persuade them that they ought to be in a position to make applications, collectively and out of that presentation to have a discussion where - by their efforts - they can increase and speed up the trade unions' involvement in a housing development programme that would add itself to the Government's effort, since we all realise that the Government cannot, by itself, deal with all the stimulus packaging areas that are necessary in a small community such as Barbados.

Mr. President, I do not believe that I need to belabour this point. I think it is very clear, but what it needs is an understanding that if the trade unions are being looked at, they would not be looked at as any special cows, but will be looked at because trade unions in themselves do not create capital and so, they cannot be seen as entrepreneurs or as being involved in entrepreneurship.

They are the collectors of the dues of their members, the majority of whom, for the most part, are people who fall within the four walls of those workers who fall in this legislation. That being so, it ought to be possible for us to be able to treat this matter in such a manner as to show that we are ready and willing to treat in the subject with the

trade unions being part of the partnership for creating stimuli.

One last comment before I take my seat, Sir, and it is a comment that came out of what was said by the Leader of the Senate. The question of protection for those most disadvantaged, is part of an issue which, I think, we would neglect at our peril. We are, as the Leader of the Senate said, a maturing community but, regrettably, we are not at the same level of being a loving community that we may have considered ourselves to be, formerly.

Asides.

SENATOR SIR ROY TROTMAN: Mr. President, I make no reference to any single Member of the Senate Chamber and, least of all, to such a distinguished person as its President.

Asides.

SENATOR SIR ROY TROTMAN: Mr. President, there are some people in this Chamber who wish to have you chase me out, but I will not permit that, Sir. I do wish to make the point that because the community has become nuclear in its vision, its orientation and its behaviour, and because families do not see themselves beyond mother, father, child or two children - I saw a picture that said two and a half, but I am not responding to anybody who tells me, I say two - because that is the case - we have a very serious difficulty with the right kinds of care being taken of those unable to help themselves that we would like.

There are far too many stories of people hearing sounds from houses, and on investigating, realising that those are the sounds of elderly people within houses, who are tied to the bed or tied into a house, so that they cannot escape and wonder around.

1.20 p.m.

SENATOR Sir ROY TROTMAN: Mr. President, I make that report not merely because it is true, but to support the view of the Honourable Leader of Government Business that it is quite necessary for us to be able to raise the level of housing for community welfare and community care that does not only treat to children but also to the elderly and those who, as sometimes it is said now, are differently able.

Mr. President, that matter becomes so grave that from time to time, it causes disruptions within the workforce. I do not need again to speak too fully on this, but it brings a worker to a position where he or she frequently finds that there is a major decision that the worker has to make as to whether that person could go to work on a given day when the child is ill, knowing full well that they cannot claim the illness of their child as the basis for their being absent, nor can they say that their ageing or senile grandparent is under the weather on a given day because they cannot use that as a reason for their absence either. Hence, so they say that they themselves are ill when they are not, and then somebody gets a slide rule and decides that they have been absent for X number of days, that they are not willing to work and that the community as a whole is without the ethos for work when, in fact, we have not judged the environment within which work takes place, so we have no real basis for knowing what kind of a community we have.

Fast judgements might be good for some. They are not good for this community in which employers, workers and governments are trying to build a partnership of trust. If we are going to build that partnership of trust, we must not undermine it, whether we are at the high level or the lower level, by making hasty comments for which there is no justification.

I thank you very much, Sir.

SENATOR Mrs. V. I. SANDIFORD-GARNER: Mr. President, I rise to support this Value Added Tax (Amendment) Bill. I wish to congratulate this Government for yet another piece of progressive legislation.

Mr. President, I listened to Senator Symmonds earlier and I will have to agree or paraphrase what Senator Trotman just said when it comes to the issue of substance. The speaker from the Other Side was certainly not in the best form today and I could understand why. He is battling solo once again and he is probably tired, so in the spirit of goodwill for this season, I will put it down to that. I am being very charitable today.

Mr. President, a government under this Democratic Labour Party is traditionally recognised as an entity which can always be depended upon for its progressive legislation and legislation that redounds to the most vulnerable in this society. I could start with the free secondary education, maternity leave, NIS benefits, free health care, and I could go on.

Mr. President, I must laud the Government for this legislation, which seeks to lend a hand again to the most vulnerable in our society. First-time homeowners will have a helping hand. It is admirable, in these stringent economic times, that a government could find room for concessions. It is not easy. The economic crisis is global. It was not born in Barbados.

Sir, this Government of social justice has found room for fiscal ease. The Honourable Leader of Government Business intimated that the value of this concession is approximately $10 000 to that homeowner.

Sir, that is not money to scoff at. Probably the better healed among us may feel so, but for somebody now starting out with little or no expendable income, $10 000 back in hand could do a lot, especially if you know how to spend money.

Sir, this piece of legislation has been added to what this Administration has already done. You could speak about the free bus rides, the raising of the ceiling for the reverse tax credit and the sale of Government units to persons living in them over 20 years.

Mr. President, I remember that in 2007, the Barbados Labour Party Government was boasting about the sale of these units and how well the sales were going. Sir, we have given them back to people. We are not selling them. Sir, all of what we have done have been done in an economy of severe constraints. These are the very times that a caring government has to step in when you have to look out for the less economically able in the society. Sir, only the most ungrateful, jealous, zealous political cretin could criticise legislation such as this.

Sir, I heard Senator Symmonds speaking about flip-flopping, speaking about the $400 000 and the $15 000. Sir, President Obama had to flip-flop. The President of the most powerful and richest nation on the globe had to review his election promises to the people of the United States of America. That is not flip-flopping, that is economic commonsense, if there is such a term.

Sir, I heard language which says that we gave empty promises when we know deep in our hearts we do not have the capacity to deliver. They spoke about contempt for the people. I have some notes here and I will tell you about contempt.

Mr. President, what is contempt for the people is when a government could sell poor people swamp land in Lower Burneys, St. Michael to build on. Contempt is when a government could sell poor people land at Bulkeley where they are paying mortgages over two years and they cannot live in the houses yet. Do you know what it is to pay mortgage for a house in which you are not living in, rent a home and support a family? That is contempt. What is contempt for people is when a former Prime Minister of this country could avail himself of National Housing Corporation land at $1 a square foot. That is contempt for the people.

Mr. President, I heard talk about insensitivity and behaviour that would lead to social unrest and a lot of inflammatory language, snide comments about what the people would and would not do. Mr. President, the behaviour I outlined before is the behaviour that would lead to social unrest that is why we had to step in and save Barbados.

Mr. President, this Government would go further. The current Minister of Housing and Lands has recently announced that he is examining a rental home system, which the Honourable Leader of Government Business spoke about earlier. This is a system in which you would rent from the Government and that rent would go towards owning your own home. That is progressive thinking. That is socially conscious governance.

This scheme is patterned somewhat on the Ujima Programme in Britain where young people could register for accommodation provided by the State or a private agency, pay their rent and as long as they are good renters and they behave themselves, the houses become available so that they could move in. Sometimes it is even shared accommodation but once you proved to be a good tenant, you are elevated to your own unit and then the space is filled by another person.

1.30 p.m.

SENATOR Mrs. V. I. SANDIFORD-GARNER: Mr. President, these are programmes where young single working persons are brought into the ambit of home ownership, where young people who previously felt totally alienated from the home-owning class in Barbados will once again, under a socially-conscious Democratic Labour Party Government, feel a sense of inclusion, a sense of ownership in the land of their birth.

Mr. President, this Government is trying in myriad of ways to ensure that working-class Barbadians could once again be owners of decent housing. We are now returning the State-owned agency that was given that mandate. We are giving that mandate back to the National Housing Corporation. We are giving the National Housing Corporation the mandate for building houses for Barbadians and not the mandate to build high-rise buildings and then you cannot pay for them, such as the building at Warrens.

I heard the Honourable Senator speaking about how are we going to pay for some of the projects that we are doing. Sir, to tell the truth, a lot of people would wonder that, when we look at the fact that we now have to pay legal cost of $90 million for a high-rise building that should have cost $33 million to build, if I am not mistaken. These are the legacies in housing that have been left to us by the Government of the Honourable Senator. Mr. President, it was a cost to us. While the squandering of millions of dollars was going on, it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the average Barbadian to get a home.

Asides.

SENATOR Mrs. V. I. SANDIFORD-GARNER: Mr. President, I heard the Honourable Senator using the term "abandoning people", but the facts speak for themselves. Sir, the Honourable Senator knows who has abandoned the people of Barbados. The Honourable Senator spoke of politics of hypocrisy and I do not know what he was engaging in when he was speaking. The Honourable Senator asked a question about the Primary Homes Programme. The Honourable Senator wanted to know its status.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: On a point of order. I think the Honourable Senator cannot properly, in conformity with Parliamentary conduct, juxtapose a Honourable Senator's speech and hypocrisy as being one and the same.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Honourable Senator, your point is made. Senator, you may want to rephrase that.

SENATOR Mrs. V. I. SANDIFORD-GARNER: Mr. President, if I did stray away or intimate that the Honourable Senator practised political hypocrisy, I would wish to apologise. Sir, we could get in here and dance all over the English language, but at the end of the day, I think people understand what I mean because we all went to school.

Mr. PRESIDENT: And I am sure that the Honourable Senator does not intend to disparage the Chair. I know that and I am going to ask that you restate your position more clearly.

SENATOR Mrs. V. I. SANDIFORD-GARNER: Mr. President, I apologise. I would never wish to disparage the Chair. I have the greatest respect for the Chair. Mr. President, let me rephrase. The Honourable Senator wanted to know the status of the Primary Homes Programme and he asked very clearly what had we done about it or what was happening with it. Sir, everybody in Barbados knows the Primary Homes Programme was a farce. Sir, one of the problems, if I remember correctly, was the reluctance of the part of the contractors to construct at the present prices. We also had problems when we came in with the fact that the vesting of lands was also a problem. There was slow mortgage disbursement. There were some projects awaiting approval from the Town Planning Department.

Sir, the crux of the matter was that the Primary Homes Programme started before it was ready. Apparently the aim of the Programme was to provide quality and affordable homes at prices ranging between $l50 000 and $400 000 - not exceeding $100 000 - but because of the Press, that Primary Home Programme had unprecedented promotion. They were unable to satisfy the demand. There were other areas which I outlined before which would have shown that the Programme was not well thought out.

Sir, if the Honourable Senator would wish to see my notes, I can show him afterwards. Sir, the point is that it was not a programme that was practical at the time and that is where we are in relation to the Primary Homes Programme.

Mr. President, as I said before, we are trying our best - even in these hard economic times - to ease hardworking ambitious Barbadians to assist them in achieving their ultimate dream in this country, which is to own their own home. Sir, under this Democratic Labour Party Government, our housing initiative will move from strength to strength.

Mr. President, I thank you.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

SENATOR THE HON. MISS M. O. P. McCLEAN: . . .

Mr. President, I beg to move that this Sitting be now suspended for one hour, to be resumed at 2.40 p.m.

The question that the Sitting be suspended until 2.40 p.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative, without division and Mr. PRESIDENT suspended the Sitting accordingly.

1.36 p.m.

RESUMPTION

MR. PRESIDENT: The Senate is resumed. Senator Chandler.

SENATOR DR. F.L. CHANDLER: Mr. President, after all the lively presentations during the morning session, I would like to make a very short intervention in the discussion on the Bill to amend the Value Added Tax Act.

It certainly agrees with the rebate on the VAT on building materials for first-time home owners for houses up to $150 000. I think this measure should encourage people to build their own homes and to be more independent and self reliant rather than relying on the National Housing Corporation for everything.

Mr. President, I would leave the details on whether or not the 7.5 per cent is correct to the accountants among us. I will not dwell on that; however, I hope the implementation would be efficient and that the refunds would be made swiftly because it is my experience that, at present, this does not always happen.

Mr. President, on the matter of refunds, I would like to put forward the case of the farming community, which has great difficulty in getting their refunds promptly and, sometimes, it puts them into a bad position. Sir, agricultural output does not attract VAT while agricultural input, including equipment, does attract VAT, so farmers are always in a position where the VAT office owes them refunds.

Mr. President, these refunds often take months and sometimes go into a year or more. In fact, there is one farmer now, who is owed over $70 000 for years and when enquiries are made at the office, you have such comments as "I have a lot of work right now. I will look at it when I get around to it." Sir, maybe some of these officers may have the problem that Senator McClean was speaking about this morning where they do not have homes in good condition to go home to and, therefore, their morale is low. I am not sure.

Mr. President, clearly, this position is unacceptable. It puts a great strain on the cash flow of farmers and, in particular, the smaller farmers. Sir, agricultural equipment, especially, is expensive and, therefore, the refund of the VAT is very important. Senator Sir Roy spoke about the problems with having to pay fines if you do not pay VAT on time but then, the Government does not pay you on time and it creates a difficulty. Similarly, the farmers are put into a difficult position, where cash flow is concerned.

Mr. President, I support the Bill and I trust the implementation would be efficient to eligible persons, they would not be frustrated and the benefit of the measure would not be negated by this inefficiency.

Mr. President, I thank you.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Boyce.

SENATOR THE HON. D. W. BOYCE: Mr. President, thank you. I wish to support this amendment to the Value Added Tax Act which provides for the refund of 70 per cent of the value of the house to families with income under $42 000 on houses up to $150 000 and for first-time homeowners.

Mr. President, the figure of 7 per cent of the cost of the house - because I am advised that when you work out the share of materials in the house and the VAT that would be applied to materials - is approximately 7 per cent because the materials account for somewhere between 45 per cent of the cost of the house.

Mr. President, the measure helps to reduce the cost of affordable housing and it is the first step in the process of dealing with VAT on housing. Senator Sir Roy made some suggestions. We have heard those suggestions and work is already ongoing to look at how this tax could be extended beyond the value of $150 000 in housing.

Mr. President, the measure that we have brought here would also encourage the construction of new housing, specifically for new buildings so that people can either build themselves, they could hire a contractor or they could buy from a developer. Sir, once the house is valued by the Commissioner of Land Tax, you claim the 7 per cent on that figure, irrespective of how you got the house constructed.

2.50 p.m.

SENATOR Hon. D. W. BOYCE: It encourages people to be independent and to pursue their own construction as well as to buy a property. Therefore, it helps people to meet that social aspiration of owning their home, and the economics of that is that they now have assets they can use to help them to further investments in time.

Sir, at this stage of the growing economy, this particular measure also will serve, in my view, to help provide part of the economic support for the Programme in the country. Already Government has identified and has begun to put in place measures for an increased level of housing, during the course of this year, and this housing Programme will provide much of the stimulus that would be required to keep the construction industry, in particular, going and to keep employment up. This particular measure helps to support that effort.

Sir, it is true that we have the Housing Incentive Act, which was passed late in 2007. I think it was December, 2007. That Act, however, a lot of people have not registered as developers under that Act. One or two who gained approval, required some specific conditions which people have not responded to as yet. That Act is now being looked at, once again, to make it more flexible and to allow easier registration and application by people who want to provide housing of that nature. Sir, that Act is also being looked at from the point of view of extending the range of houses to be covered by that Act and, in time, that matter will come back to Parliament once it has been properly discussed and drafted.

Sir, while we have the Housing Incentive Act, which is for the use of developers, we also have the change in the Value Added Tax (Amendment) Bill which allows individuals to buy a house or to construct a house. The two things will, hopefully, work together to allow an overall level of incentives for housing. Sir, this measure, if the number of houses that were constructed below this value would have continued, would cost the Government approximately $7 million in Value Added Tax revenue and once again add stimulus into the economy at this time.

Mr. President, an increase in construction would also be, in a sense, a revenue that would normally have come to Government, but would be given up in that sense. Sir, this is part of the incentives to encourage the smaller man to invest and to continue his efforts to own property, and to become an investor in his own rights in the economy.

This housing Programme, of which this is a small part, is part of the overall programme of works that have been implemented over the last year by the Government. We began by bringing forward the increase of the reverse tax credits last year, the free bus rides for school children and the summer camps for all children. Last year we put an additional sum of money into the marketing of the island's tourism, by giving the Barbados Tourism Authority an additional $10 million.

Two weeks ago we gave an additional $10 million for the promotion of the industry, and an additional $15 million for the tourism industry relief fund. In this fiscal year the Prime Minister has indicated that there would probably be additional amounts during the course of this year to support the tourism industry. Sir, that is an additional $35 million in this fiscal year for the tourism industry and there will be more coming next year for the industry.

Since the Budget of 2008, we have also increased the road construction programme in October 2008. We have also increased the repair programme for schools, pushing the construction of a new school. Through the Central Bank we have had the guarantee scheme for small businesses expanded and we have increased the liquidity for the commercial banks by way of the Central Bank resuming its discount programme.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: On a point of order. I am almost 100 per cent sure that the liquidity programme for businesses, et cetera, cannot be germane to this debate. It has transcended the issue of VAT relief. It has gone into the general finance packages of the Government and I do not believe that is in conformity with the Standing Orders and their Rules and relevance.

Mr. PRESIDENT: No point of order.

SENATOR Hon. D. W. BOYCE: Mr. President, further to all that has been said, we have already put in place the arrangements, and negotiations are close at an end, for the construction of two additional office buildings, as well as further road widening, road improvements and other projects are being worked out, as we speak, to make sure there is sufficient activity in the construction industry. This VAT measure, quite apart from encouraging people to own their houses, also provides some encouragement to keep the construction industry going.

Sir, on the matter of the tax on property, when this Administration took over office of Government, valuations for properties were well on the way and have almost been completed. There was a certain structure to the property tax arrangements and that structure, as we speak, is being reexamined with a view to making sure that persons who reckoned that the tax has escalated too rapidly because of the valuations, that there is a more gradual increase in the tax rate people have to pay on land tax. Sir, that is being looked at and I am sure when the time is right, further information will be provided and will come to Parliament.

Sir, there has been no policy change by this Administration that makes property taxes higher. It remains that which was there and it will be dealt with in the course of time. That is being dealt with now and will come to Parliament.

Sir, with those few words I support this Amendment of the Value Added Tax.

I thank you.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Senator Marville.

SENATOR R. O. MARVILLE: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. President, I rise to support the amendment to the Value Added Tax Bill. Sir, like Senator Trotman, I think that the actual figure of $150 000 - and I recognise that one has to put a figure - is slightly low, and at $170 000 it might have been right, but there is a tendency to deal with hundreds or parts of a hundred like that, Sir.

Basically, I thought that the idea of the initial $400 000 was way too high, because then I could have assured you that I could have built four upper middle-class, two-storey, hurricane proof houses for less than $400 000 in terms of materials. Sir, the lower income persons in this country are the persons who suffer most from the lack of housing. I do think that we need to concentrate on that area, at least to begin with, Sir.

In the difficult economic times that we endure at the moment, it would be rather rash to go to the higher limit immediately or to any higher limit. A limit of about $170 000, I think would be excellent for the purpose of the ordinary working man, whom we have neglected for too long. I think we have missed a fundamental Bajan tradition, that is, that if you do not have a house of your own, you are not yet a man.

Mr. President, with those few words, I support the Bill.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Asides.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Senator Benn.

SENATOR Hon. H. LaV. BENN: Mr. President, I rise to support the amendment to the Value Added Tax Bill, 2009. Sir, I applaud the initiative taken and the plans by this new Government, in seeking to make sure that new homeowners, in particular, are given an opportunity.

Yes, in the Democratic Labour Party's Manifesto, we stated $400 000, 100 days and to some, it may have sounded a bit ambitious; however, I believe that even on assuming office we would have wished that within the first 100 days we could have increased the ceiling to $500 000. Then, we had to take stock and we looked at what we found. Sometimes you have a plan to do something and then when you look at the reality, you realise that you have to do a little bit of tweaking.

Sir, if you remember, last year December, we were in these very Chambers seeking to increase the borrowing capacity of Government, raising it from $500 million to $1.5 billion, because we came and found some strange things in our off-budget expenditure, and a number of things that were done by the last Administration. We would have been happy to have raised it to $500 000 but, alas, we had to amend it. We had to come back and go back to the drawing board, hence, $150 000 and we are going forward with it.

Mr. President, it is not that we just sought to hoodwink the public. We have taken the appropriate action and I am just hoping that some of the lending institutions in Barbados, including the credit unions, would also make funds available to prospective homeowners, because there are many people in Barbados, particularly in the rural districts, where grandfather, grandmother, mother, father would have died, passed on, and left some small parcels of land for people to inherit and they would want to do their own building rather than to rely on the National Housing Corporation. I am sure that this stance taken by the Democratic Labour Party Government would go a long way in assisting homeowners, particularly the new homeowners.

I also want to ensure that some public relations exercise would be stepped up, so that people would understand that they can qualify. What do they have to do? When people apply for rebates and refunds, the requisite forms have to be filled out properly. For instance, homeowners must have a valuation of the dwelling house from the Commissioner of Land Tax, or a registered valuer, a certificate of completion from the Chief Town Planner and a sworn Affidavit stating that the applicant is a first time homeowner. These things must be spelled out so that people who are applying for the VAT refund will have very little difficulty, or that this would not add to the time that they have to wait.

I heard Senator Symmonds mention the Turf Club when Senator Boyce was speaking. I hope he would not mention the Turf Club too hard because those people over there were very strong supporters, financially perhaps, of the last Administration, and they would not want them to hear.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, on a point of order. I am not sure what Senator Benn is saying. He must be misleading the Senate. I made no interjection for the records with respect to the Barbados Turf Club. If his mind is bothering him about the Turf Club, Sir, that is a matter to be taken up elsewhere. I had nothing to do with giving the money to the Turf Club, Sir.

Asides.

SENATOR THE HON. H. LAV. BENN: Mr. President, I bear the point that Senator Chandler mentioned about the farmers. It is a pity that farmers have to wait for such a long period of time for funds to be given back to them. Farmers who have to make input into their activities in the farm, everything has to be cash on a basis. If a farmer wants to buy seeds, it is cash; fertiliser, it is cash; seedlings, it is cash. He may get a little credit from the feed companies for maybe 30 days. Whenever he is ready to get his produce sold, somebody wants to credit it, if it is not stolen.

Asides.

SENATOR HON. H. LAV. BENN: Now that he will get his rebate on VAT, he has to wait for long periods of time. Sir, often, you do not even mind waiting, especially if you know the system, but it is the reaction you get from some officers. They show this callousness to you. You get the impression that they do not care.

Asides.

SENATOR HON. H. LAV. BENN: Insensitivity is the correct word. Sir, with Public Sector Reform and NISE, you would wish that public servants were much more responsiveness to needs, not only of farmers, but to persons who have to apply to the VAT Office for their refunds. I am really hoping that. Yes, I am in full support of the Amendment, but I want to be sure that a good exercise is done to alert them as to what the requirements are, and if there is anything, Senator Chandler, that our Ministry can do to get the VAT Office to shorten the time for rebates to the farming community, I am sure that we will use our good offices to that effect.

With those few words, Mr. President, I am happy to support the amendment to the Value Added Tax, 2009.

Asides.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Senator Thompson.

SENATOR MISS H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. President, this is a measure that one really cannot quarrel with, the attempt to remove VAT off housing within a price range that makes it more affordable for those in the lower income ranges. In that regard, there is something positive about it. Nonetheless, I must voice a number of concerns.

3.10 p.m.

SENATOR Miss H. E. THOMPSON: I heard the Honourable Senator Benn conceding just now that in the Manifesto of the Democratic Labour Party, the commitment was to give VAT relief on building materials for properties valued at $400 000. Senator Benn indicated that was the intention, but the intention was thwarted by the state of the economy.

Mr. President, that is an explanation I cannot accept, the reason being that only in March or April of last year, the Governor of the Central Bank of Barbados indicated that the macro fundamentals and the economy were, in fact, strong.

Sir, more important than that, the promise to take the VAT off houses worth up to $400 000 was repeated in the Throne Speech delivered in this Honourable Chamber. At that time, the Administration would have had an opportunity, particularly the Minister of Finance and the junior Ministers in the Ministry of Finance as they then were, to be briefed about the state of the economy. Mr. President, if in fact the economy was in the bad state that the Honourable Senator Benn is suggesting, then that provision should never have found its way into the Throne Speech. It was always an unrealistic, undoable, unworkable recommendation. It is like the cell phone tax. It was just not viable, practical or workable in the context of Barbadian society and economy.

Mr. President, it was put out there because it appeared attractive to people and it was one of the things that was supposed to have been delivered in 100 days. In fact, 13 months into the Administration, the other housing commitments made in the Manifesto, and repeated in the Throne Speech, to build 2 000 houses and produce 2 500 lots every year has not been fulfilled. In fact, the Administration is way behind on that particular target. They are less than one-fifth of the way toward achieving that target, again another unrealistic figure that they have not met last year and will not meet this year coming.

Asides.

SENATOR MISS H. E. THOMPSON: Sir, I know that you do not hear asides live. Sir, it is called excuses for their inability to manage, demonstrated by the Budget of July of last year which came at a time when the international economy was in crisis. Therefore, the proper approach was to have a stimulus package and measures that would have stimulated the revenue earnings sectors of the economy and allow people to build houses and to do better than they were in fact doing.

Instead, we got a Budget that severely taxed every revenue earning sector of the economy and imposed severe personal taxes on people in a situation where what you needed was to give relief at every level to ensure that economic activity was stimulated. Now, we have excuses about the mess that they found. What we really are hearing are excuses about an inability to properly manage this economy.

It is evident in the fact that between 1994 and 2007, we were able to create 30 000 jobs and move employment from 27 per cent to 7 per cent. It is now going back up again with 900 people laid off at Four Seasons within the last week. That has nothing to do with the subcontractors and the people whom they had engaged off the site to do work for them to fulfill the project requirements. The week before, JADA Construction sent home another 200 persons. I am hearing that one of the big stores in town is to put people on a four-day week starting very soon. Rotherly Construction sent home 200 people two weeks ago.

Sir, already you are seeing the impact of the Budget building on top of the international situation causing extreme hardship for people. This is a cause of major concern. It was because jobs were created that people were able, under the last Administration, to embark on the massive housing construction campaign that we did. Sir, I have only half hour, so I am going to go very quickly.

Under the Barbados Labour Party, the General Workers' Loan Scheme was increased from about $20 million to $69.9 million giving 5 636 persons loans and increasing the loan period from 20 to 40 years for those who found the terms onerous. That was significant because it meant that general workers who needed access to funds were able to go to the National Housing Corporation which administered the Scheme and get this money at concessionary rates.

Sir, the interest rates were moved from 9 per cent to 6 per cent. Of course, we also introduced the concept of the 100 per cent mortgage, which allowed a large number of people, once they were working, to be able to build houses and to access loan capital without having to themselves

accumulate the usual 10, 12, 15 or 20 per cent before they could go to the bank.

In addition, the Physical Development Plan protected some 40 000 acres of land to ensure that it was not taken out of the natural resource state and that it could be used for purposes other than houses. The point was that there was a protection of 40 000 acres of land under the Physical Development Plan passed in the Other Place.

Equally, there was the introduction of land at $2.50 in urban tenantries which allowed a lot of poor people, simple people, and low income earners to be able to buy the tenantry lands on which they live at $2.50 a square foot.

Mr. President, in 2006 or 2007, we removed land tax off property worth up to $125 000, or the first $125 000. In the second year, it was increased to $150 000. This allowed a lot of people to come off the tax roll or pay lower land tax, therefore, giving them greater disposable income.

Mr. President, the Honourable Senator Boyce spoke about the way the tax structure has not been changed and they would see about it. Mr. President, that was the responsibility of the Administration last year. In fact, every two or three years the land tax bands changed automatically. It is the responsibility of the Minister of Finance - I think there were two or three Ministers of Finance since January last year, because there was a Senior Minister and Junior Ministers in that Ministry - to ask the Commissioner of Land Tax to see the valuation bands and the Minister of Finance then gives direction how the bands are to be reduced so that the tax yield is cut, but is not onerous for the householder. That was not done last year.

The Minister of Finance and the sub-ministers in that Ministry did not intervene to help the taxpayers of Barbados. That is why the land taxes went up so high last year, so it is the fault of the Democratic Labour Party Government.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. President, in relation to the Neighbourhood Upgrading Programme, negotiated by the Barbados Labour Party and signed in January last year, once the negotiations by the current Government are completed, would also give between $10 000 to $20 000 per person for neighbourhood upgrading and housing construction in urban Barbados, particularly in areas of the City, and those areas in St. Michael where there is very dense housing and where there is a need for neighbourhood upgrading, the development of sites and services, the improvement of drainage and things of that sort.

Mr. President, people will remember the state of Cane Garden and other housing developments that have been left abandoned in l994, with bits of wall, bits of steel, toilets missing, et cetera. When we came to Government, there were a slue of housing projects that needed to be addressed, which were not addressed by that past Administration.

We built all those houses and put them in good order. We then started systematically to accrue a land bank, out of which we built houses at places such as Apes Hill, Bagatelle, Bakers, Barnetts, Bartletts, Batteleys, Bonnetts, Bournes Land, Constant, Crane, Deacons, Eden Lodge, Farmers, Gall Hill, Gibbons, Golden Mile, Grazettes, Groves, et cetera. Actually, from A to W, there is no denying that.

Mr. President, the Honourable Senators on the Other Side would want to give the impression that there was no new housing between l994 and l999, when there were the London Bourne Towers and other places. Sir, the interest rate was also reduced from 9 per cent to 6 per cent on loans from the National Housing Corporation.

Sir, there were thousands of houses built. Mr. President, there were 3 578 houses that were built at Greens, Country Park, Constant Phase 2, Coverley, Lancaster, Fairy Valley and Spring Garden, St. Lucy. Between those alone, there were 2 866 lots and 712 houses. Sir, there were 3 578 houses and lots, just from those developments alone, and none of those was on the list which I called previously.

Mr. President, there was a $5 000 sum given for home improvement available to all Barbadians. Equally, under the income tax - because one way of helping people is to give them concessions by way of the income tax, previously certainly concessions have been removed and we restored the income tax concession for home repairs, renovations, mortgage interest and solar water heaters, to help to give impetus to the indigenous industry and for the beneficial impact in relation to both energy and environment.

There was a $50 million housing bond launched to facilitate a programme called Housing Settlement 2000, which was concentrated across places such as Orange Hill, Apes Hill and Lancaster. That was an ongoing programme.

I spoke before to the General Workers' Loans Scheme. I am dealing now with the Housing Credit Fund, to which there were... Sir, I can only list the things because in the time allotted to me I do not have enough time. When we came to Government, the Housing Credit Fund had disbursed $918 550 in 1993/1994. This was a fund which facilitated housing to civil servants in the low ranking sector and to poor people in Barbados.

We increased the amount. In fact, in 1992/1993, 60 persons had benefitted from the loan. In l993/1994, eight people had benefitted from it with their mortgage. In 1999, we moved the people who benefitted with mortgages to 162. There were those who got loans for improvement of tenantry houses. There were those who got for home improvement. We increased the disbursement to $12 881 000. In 2002, that was $l0.6 million that was disbursed. In 2001/2002, $15 million was disbursed. In 2000/2001, $18.1 million was disbursed. Sir, this was to facilitate construction, housing improvement, and housing growth in Barbados.

Sir, because all the construction cannot be done by the National Housing Corporation alone, if we were to meet housing demand, there was a significant move to facilitate mortgages and loans in the context of the private sector to allow housing to be built. Therefore, any developer who was building 15 or more houses valued at $150 000 or less, was given concessions on VAT, corporation tax and import duty, in order to capitalise and to encourage building in the lower income sector of the market.

Mr. President, although we were building all the time, we were also coming to Parliament and acquiring land. Sir, we left a land bank of 535 acres, from which the present administration is benefitting and on which they are building.

Mr. President, in terms of mortgages, the accumulative mortgage market in Barbados in 1991 was $9.493 million; in 1992, it was $6.3 million; in 1993, it was $8.4 million and in l994, reflecting the hardship in the economy, it was $4.6 million. By 2000, it had gone up to $26 981 million; in 2002, it was $29 million.

Sir, I will not go through every year but the housing boom in Barbados, during the period 1994 to 2007 was the largest ever seen by the country to the extent that by the time we left Government, the accumulative mortgage market for average Barbadians...

Asides.

SENATOR MISS H. E. THOMPSON: This is for houses and you can refer to the Central Bank Reports from which these figures came, going all the way back to l99l. I did not make them up. They are the Reports of the Central Bank.

Mr. President, the accumulative mortgage market stood at $1.5 billion, when we had found them at $4.620 million. That figure by itself shows the unprecedented growth in the mortgage market and the number of average Barbadians of all socio-economic classes who sought out mortgages and were able to get them; first, because we had facilities in place to accommodate them; secondly, because people were working and not being sent home; thirdly, because the economy was strong and people had confidence in it, major projects were not collapsing daily, as we are now seeing.

Mr. President, we are virtually now back to where we were in l994, where people are already talking about the devaluation of the Barbados dollar. Sir, people are now wondering if their money would be safe.

3.30 p.m.

There is a level of concern and if you do not believe so, you are fooling yourselves.

Mr. President, there was the Joint Venture Programme that was also ongoing. I spent less than two years as Minister, Sir, but at Blackman's, St. Joseph, one of the Joint Venture Programmes was completed under me. Sir, there were houses going at Coverley; at Old Deanes Town; at Kent; at Grazettes; at Rices; at Ellerton; at Lancaster, Phases 1 and 3; at Husbands Gardens; at Arch Hall and at Hoyte's.

Sir, these are not locations that I mentioned before because I was speaking about other programmes before like Settlement 2000 and so on, but these were programmes going under the Joint Venture Programme. Sir, these are a few thousand houses being done under the Joint Venture Programme.

Mr. President, there were several different kinds of programmes going from which the public could benefit and did benefit and in which there was a housing programme that many Barbadians benefitted from. The 100 per cent mortgage facility, which I mentioned earlier, was started by the Administration, through the Barbados Mortgage Finance, which was then an agency of the Government and it then was mirrored by private sector lending agencies. Sir, that in itself caused tremendous growth in the housing sector because persons who would not previously, would have been able to get houses, were able to get.

Mr. President, the Primary Homes Programme, which I initiated and which I heard described as unworkable at that time, we still managed under the Primary Homes Programme though I heard it was not practical and that it was unworkable to build three Primary Homes Programme project in less than two years; the largest of which is at Mount Poyer and maybe has over 120 houses.

Asides.

SENATOR MISS H.E. THOMPSON: Sir, I do not know how many there are, but there are three or four

avenues of houses at Mount Poyer in St. Lucy and, Sir, I have seen them myself. The point is that a programme was developed to help the lowest sector of the market.

Mr. President, there is today, no problem and that is one of the points I want to make here. I hear from the News ,houses being built at $140 000 and $170 000 by the present Administration but, Sir, that does not help the lower income market because to qualify for a mortgage to service that, the income of the household has to be at least $4 000.

Asides.

SENATOR MISS H.E. THOMPSON: Sir, it is a fact. Sir, a mortgage for $170 000 is about $1 500. They generally let you pay about one-third of your salary towards the mortgage, so your salary has to be in the region of at least $4 000. Sir, people who want to get them, could face the bank for themselves no matter who gets up to deny it.

Mr. President, at the moment, there is no product being built by the Government for the lower end of the market where the greatest demand is because, in our culture, the private sector builders would always build for middle income and upper income, where the larger profit margins are. Sir, the challenge always is to finance the lower income sector of the market. The Government is not now doing it and must find mechanisms to do it.

Mr. President, this VAT relief is not what they promised because the promise was to take off all the VAT up to $400 000. Sir, half of the VAT up to $150 000 falls way below what they have promised. Sir, equally the number of lots and houses that have been built to date also falls way below what they promised to do in one year.

Mr. President, as I have indicated previously, there were houses built under the Primary Homes Programme during the time that I was the Minister. I still think that it was a useful and innovative programme even if it was not implemented subsequent to my leaving, in the way that I would have wanted to see.

Sir, the point was that it was an attempt to satisfy the lower end of the market. Sir, some of the measures with which a government comes up will work spectacularly and others will meet with less success. I heard Senator Benn talking a moment ago about having to tweak things and, therefore, this administration must now find a product, if it does not want to use the Primary Homes Programme for that end of the market. Sir, I attempted to do so. The present Government must now do so, but it as not done it yet.

Mr. President, I am tempted at one level to say the Government should not bother but with the amount of people at that end of the market who are being sent home and put on short time, they are not going to be able to afford any houses. Sir, part of the goal we sought in housing came directly from the fact that people were working, had disposable income and there were capital instruments in the marketplace that allowed them access to the financing to be able to get the houses they wanted.

Mr. President, at the moment, you do not have the products. You do not have the instruments in the market and the economy is not sufficiently strong because those people are being sent home. Sir, a lot of people are going to be wary of taking mortgages in a market such as this. Sir, the Government is not going to be in great demand for houses because the Government is not managing the economy well enough to capitalise on the demand.

Mr. President, what I would argue, however, and urge is this... I have said this before and, Sir, I am not asking to create any legacy to me. I think there are people in here trained in sociology and I believe that most of the people who aspire to be politicians do have some kind of social conscience.

Sir, I have said before that part of the reason why we defined the Primary Homes Programme in the way that we did was that I do not like to hear people talking about low income housing. I personally think that it is degrading because I do not think anybody buys a low-income house. Sir, people buy a house in the price range that they can afford and it may be a first house for them.

Mr. President, I do not think they should say they are building low-income houses because it is part of how you stigmatise people. If you do not want to say Primary Homes, you could call it first homes, second homes or call them anything that you come up with, but I do not feel that a house should be referred to as a low-income house. In fact, in Barbados, a lot of what we build and call low-income houses is really very high quality in comparison with what you find on the international market.

3.40 p.m.

SENATOR Miss H.E. THOMPSON: That gives people the basics and then allows them to build in such a way “as they catch their hand”, to use a Barbadian expression, as their circumstances improve and more resources become available to them, they then improve on the nature of the house that you gave them, that first leg up or start up.

I think that it is degrading to say that you are giving a person a low income house. You are giving them a start. You are giving them a first home. You are giving them an

opportunity home, however you define it. I called them primary homes. I would like them to be called something else. I really do not like the idea of living in a society where we talk about giving people a low income house, especially as I indicated, a lot of the houses built, whether in the private sector or public sector, are really not low quality houses.

Mr. PRESIDENT: The Senator has two more minutes.

SENATOR Miss H.E. THOMPSON: Therefore, there is the broader question to which I have not heard anybody speak to today. It is the issue of the philosophy of housing a nation. At some point I hope that we will get past the politics of saying we did, you all did not do, and we are going to do, although I did not hear anybody say today what the proposals are, and what it is the Government intends to do. At a philosophical level, there has to be a discussion about how one houses a nation, and how one finds available the finance to give everybody who aspires a home a home.

In fact that is a fundamental question which we need to ask. Can everybody who aspires to own a home really afford to be a homeowner, with all of the expense involved in home ownership? Once you own a home there are certain expenses insurance, land taxes, depending on the bracket, and maintenance that go with it. There are persons who, even if you help them to own a property, do not have the level of disposable income, depending on which of the income earning brackets they are in, to afford to maintain a home. It is at that level I hope that we will get at some point to discuss the issue of housing in Barbados and to be debated in that way, because I would really want to hear beyond the Manifesto and Throne Speech promises that are totally unworkable, what the real practical interventions in the marketplace are going to be.

Sir, in that regard, I am happy to say that I am proud of the record of the Barbados Labour Party Government in relation to housing, though not perfect it really transformed the housing market, and capitalised the largest building boom that this country has ever seen. I welcome this intervention as partially positive but falling way below what the public was promised.

I am much obliged to you, Sir.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Senator Alleyne.

SENATOR D. McD. ALLEYNE: Sir, I really did not plan to speak in this debate. I thought that a government giving a rebate to householders, no matter how small, in the environment in which it is done, would be appreciated by all Barbadians and all Senators.

In fact, the earlier speaker on the Other Side found there was no divide, he would support the rebate. He had a problem with what he called the hypocrisy, that is what he said. Therefore, I did not think it would be necessary, if we agree that the rebate is well-intentioned and people would benefit from that rebate.

Sir, having then listened to Senator Thompson, and I want to congratulate her for her presence. I thought that her earlier speech, following the Throne Speech, that she did not want to be here was being honoured. So I am glad that she is here with us this afternoon. I am glad to have you. If I can refer to an earlier speaker that though the length was long, the quality may have been short.

Sir, the truth is, we have no right here, that is if everything she said is true. Sir, think about it, 2 600 houses this year and 1 400 next year. Why is there a problem with housing then if everything Senator Thompson said is true, there is no problem with housing? Sir, I repeat, if everything that she said is true, there is no problem with housing, $80 million this year, $60 million the next year, a list of figures.

Every politician in Barbados would tell you that the major problems facing Barbadians are housing and health. The Senator sat today and spoke about $219 million spent this place, $69 million spent the next place, and every day you turn around, I want a piece of land, I want a house, Sir, or help me with a house.

Sir, the truth is, I did not believe a word that was said. I did not believe. The rest of you can all believe it.

Sir, I want to thank Senator Trotman for two very good ideas. I think sometimes we have to depend on the Independent Senators to bring balance to these debates, because the partisanship sometimes forces people to defend their positions. I thought that Senator Trotman's position of the extension of the debate to first-time home owners, no matter their salary, is something I would urge the Government to look at and see if it is possible.

Sir, I have to support special provisions for trade unions, because at the National Union of Public Workers (NUPW) we have just embarked on a project with the Government to build some houses for public officers as well.

I want to thank Senator Chandler for speaking about the issue of efficiency. My fellow Senator Benn also echoed that position. Sir, a lot of the structures in Government need reforming. I also want to make a political point that the last Government so berated public workers, and took responsibility away from them that a lot of them are afraid to make decisions, because a lot of the Ministers were responsible for decisions that should have been left to

public officers, because they were making decisions based, not on priority or efficiency, but favour. That is why a lot of them are hesitant to make decisions. I hope that this Government does not fall into that trap. Let the public officers do their work.

Sir, I am not surprised that the issue is whether it is $150 000 or $400 000. I am not surprised. If we went to $120 000 the Opposition of today has no interest in people who work for small salaries, none whatsoever. They would like the tax rebate to be at $1 million because that is the crowd that they serve. They want it to go to $1 million in a tax rebate. If the Government has $50 million to give up in tax, and they say they are going to give it to people who work for $50 000, it is a problem for the Barbados Labour Party because they want the $50 million in tax relief to go to people working for $600 000. That is the issue.

Sir, if you examine their record in the construction of units for rental, it speaks to a social policy designed to look after the people at the top, not 10 houses, except the replacement built for the Ministry of Transport and Works because of road construction. You move a house, so you have to build one to replace it.

No new projects were done under the Barbados Labour Party in 14 years. Get up and point them out. Sir, every one that was done related to the Ministry of Transport and Works constructing a road forming the relocation of in people, people who had to be removed you had to put them back in another house.

Sir, there was no policy on rental units, so much so that at the corner of Passage Road, that is why I have to come to that all the time because it is close to my heart.

3.50 p.m.

CONTINUATION OF SENATOR D. McD. ALLEYNE:

The corner of Country Road and Bank Hall started in 1997.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, on a point of order. I have thought long and hard before I decided that I would interrupt the Honourable Senator, while he was trying to lift the roof off the Senate with his voice.

Mr. President, there has to be an adherence to basic truth. I have said in here before and I say here again. In the constituency of St. James Central, in a place called Arch Hall, in 2003 when I went there as an elected member, there was no housing development but there is one today. In Hoyte's Village, there was no Stage 3, but there is one today. Sir, if the numbers must be called, 42 in one and 48 in the other.

Mr. President, if you can look at just two simple geographic districts in one constituency, it stretches the truth beyond the realms of acceptability in this Chamber - or in any other place - for Senator Alleyne to be going down this road about how nothing was done in 14 years. I understand he has a political axe to grind and I do not want to stop him from doing that, but I believe that we must be guided by his leader's admonition this morning, that there should be a measure of adherence to honesty.

SENATOR D. McD. ALLEYNE: Mr. President, I will ignore that, Sir.

Sir, I spoke about rental units. I made it very clear what I was speaking about, so if the Honourable Senator Symmonds wants to jump up, jump back up. The units in your constituency that the people got rid of you, are not rental units. You did not have the courage, the philosophy, the social policy agenda to build two single rental units for your constituency because you do not cater to that group. This is not of your concern. The people who are working for $140 a week are not in your mantel, so jump up again, please, and say that I am wrong.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Mr. President, I must interrupt the Honourable Senator again.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, before Senator Symmonds rises on his point of order, I have to ask Senator Alleyne, could you please endeavour to address the Chair?

Senator Symmonds, you are on a point of order.

SENATOR K. D. SYMMONDS: Sir, the point is just simply this. The Senator is misleading the Senate. I do not build units, so for him to charge me with not caring and not having built rental units, Sir, is preposterous.

On one hand he would charge that Ministers of the Government were corrupt, and put their hands in the public purse. Now, he is berating me for not having done so, and built units with the money. Sir, I do not know what he wants me to do. I do not build units. I never had money to build units anywhere.

Mr. PRESIDENT: All right Senators, let us get on with the debate and try to keep it at the level it has started.

SENATOR D. McD. ALLEYNE: Mr. President, I take your point. Sir, when the Senator was bragging about the 42 and the 48, the impression was not given that you had anything to do with it, Sir, but that is all right. Fine with me.

Mr. President, the fundamental issue here is that here is a government in an environment where internationally, people are uncertain, a policy is put out to give a rebate for $400 000 said in the Manifesto, and it is reduced to $150 000. Sir, the next day, it could go to $400 000, given whatever is the environment.

Mr. President, we had a debate in here about public servant salaries and it came from a Senator on the Other Side that, maybe, we should look to ask for a little holding because the people as aware about the environment. Sir, here is an Opposition, with little responsibility, except to keep noise, asking a government to go beyond what is unreal.

I would be grateful, Sir, if they could give the $400 000. I think every Senator in here would be happy if that were possible. If the same economist that you were saying is the best brain in the Democratic Labour Party believes that is what he can do, you should be complimenting the Democratic Labour Party for taking his advice. Again, Sir, Senator Symmonds should be complimenting this Party for taking his advice.

Sir, to score political points, he spoke for an hour and two seconds, went around like a merry-go-round, could not land, a good thing the electricity went off, and he was stopped. Nobody knew the point he made. Sir, I saw you moving in your Chair, very uncomfortably, and I am glad that you are the sort of individual to allow him to do what he was doing.

Now, Sir, I have a few points to make to him. I want to say that this Democratic Labour Party, of which I am a member, and have been a member from the time I was 16 years old, has always demonstrated, above everything else, an interest in the poor and the working class.

Asides.

SENATOR D. McD. ALLEYNE: Sir, no matter what the circumstance. If they had shifted from those high goals at anytime, I would not have joined anybody else, because it was a philosophical standing in what you believe, but I would have taken a back seat. Sir, you have to believe in something at sometime.

Sir, I am saying that this policy is an extension of that philosophy of providing ease for the people at the bottom. I want to say that I am happy that at the corner of Country Road, that eye sore when you pass, there are two, two-storey buildings going up out of the wreck left by Senator Symmonds' administration, which he pulled to his bosom, that he loved up.

Asides.

Senator D. McD. ALLEYNE: Mr. President, I just want to make two more points and then I will take my seat. Sir, this matter has implications because I want to urge this Government that I support to also look at provision for families, and not only the individual. If I had a grandmother that was alive and I wanted to repair her house, I believe that some consideration should be given on VAT for a project like that, so that I could take the responsibility off the State.

In other words, Sir, if I am doing it, and my grandmother's house wants four boards fixed and it is known that it is her house, not my house but I am paying for it, she should be given VAT off for that effort, because it is not a new house.

Sir, the State is responsible for repairing these houses and they cannot repair every house. I am saying if I am giving that extension to my grandparent or whomever, the VAT should be taken off the materials. There has to be some way to police it so that persons cannot abuse it. Sir, I would like to make that suggestion for consideration.

Mr. President, the other problem is land. I do not know what is the cost to acquire a piece of land. I know what is the going rate. Whatever is possible, this Government has a responsibility to do something about the land cost in Barbados. I sat here in amazement and could not believe that the Other Side could speak about housing solutions, without discussing land.

I am not a property owner in that sense, but I have seen values moved from $60 000 to $500 000 in 10 years, for the same piece of rock. Sir, a piece of rock worth $60 000 is now $500 000. The Opposition could stand in this Chamber and talk about the success of their housing policy. Sir, you do not build houses in the sky. Sir, if people do not have land, they cannot build even a dog house. I am amazed that I could sit here and listen to a repetition of numbers thrown out of a hat, with no consistency, saying that it is related to this or that, and everyday somebody asks for a house spot, or a house. Sir, you will find that people want to rent houses. We have people in Barbados renting rooms.

4.00 p.m.

Senator D. McD. ALLEYNE: People sleep in the day and in the night in the same bed and it is incumbent on this Government to do something about it. Sir, Ministers are defending a record that people voted against. Sir, I am tired of the Opposition trying to give the impression that they did so much in housing. They could talk about anything else and I would not have a fight with it, but not on housing. The housing policy over the last 10 years was dismal and concentrated on enriching people. Land

speculators and lawyers were the persons making the money.

Sir, there was an increase in real estate people in that period. We went from about 20 people dealing with land to nearly 200. Everybody wanted to sell land.

Sir, after they got voted out, all of them are now real estate people because they understand the environment they created. Now they are asking this Government to correct the ills of 14 years of malice and self-interest. They come in this Chamber now talking about $269 million, but to whose benefit? That is to nobody in Bridge Gap's, Thomas Gap's or Well Gap's interest.

I do not have a constituency, so I could call any place. I am talking about people living in gaps. That money was to the benefit of those living in the terraces and heights and on beach land.

Sir, those people living in Thomas Gap, Well Gap and Bridge Gap are still renting. They cannot find a piece of land and you have an Honourable Senator reciting figures about she put in $169 million, which is going to stick in my craw because I know how many houses could have been built with that $169 million.

Sir, I have no problem in supporting this amendment. I am urging the Government, if it is possible, to move it to $200 000, then to $250 000, then to $300 000 and then $400 000. The Government has five years to get there. Sir, the problem with the Opposition is that they have not yet recognised that the people voted them out on record. Sir, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak. I support this measure. Thank you very much.

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN: Mr. President, I must begin my wrap up comments by first congratulating the Honourable Senator on the Other Side for carrying the burden. I was planning to comment on a number of points made by his colleague because, as the Honourable Senator indicated, she did not hear some specific things which were said. I believe that perhaps, she was not listening to a radio while outside of this Chamber, not even to hear her colleague, and she has not given us enough time to hear responses to her comments.

I suppose if the Honourable Senator has difficulties, that is for her and her side to deal with. Sir, I believe that you should not comment, if you do not know what you miss.

Mr. President, while the language of this Chamber is English, as a youngster who began to wear glasses at about 11 years old, I remember my optician saying to me, because he discovered I was learning French: "Do you know what 'tu jour la politesse' means?" It means "politeness always". Mr. President, I think people need to be polite to this Chamber as well...

Mr. President, in the event that my comments are being heard by the Honourable Senator in absentia, I would want to indicate, because a number of places were identified as part of the housing project...

Mr. President, when we speak, we need, as they say, to compare golden apples with golden apples, bananas with bananas and oranges with oranges. If I am correct, May 1994 was the month in which the previous Administration took office and left office in January 2008. That is as contrasted with January 2008 to February 25, 2009...

Asides.

SENATOR Miss H. E. THOMPSON: On a point of privilege. Mr. President, three or more comments were made today, both with Honourable Senators on their feet and sitting in their Chairs - I know you did not hear the sotto voce comments - on a matter which I think does impact on the privilege of Honourable Senators and on me personally to which I would want to speak.

As I indicated, several Honourable Senators spoke to the fact that I was not here earlier. Sir, there is a tradition, which I think the Chair is well aware of that, generally, those kinds of points are not taken and they are particularly not taken here in this Chamber, because the Opposition has only two members. The fact that people do have professional careers and so means that from time to time they are not going to be here.

On the last occasion that the Senate met when I was here, there were three or four Honourable Senators from the Government side who were not here, and no one commented on it, because it was believed that they were either pursuing Government business, or those who are not in Government full-time, were pursuing their legitimate careers.

Mr. President, I do not know if the Chamber met in the last three or four weeks, but I was off the island on work related travel and did, in fact, treat the Chair to a courtesy letter indicating that I had to be working away from the island for several consecutive weeks.

Further, this morning I had an emergency with a client and I contacted my colleague Senator to say I cannot be there to lead, you are going to have to carry it.

Mr. President, it is only two Members. It is entirely possible that there are days when one, or either, or both of the two Opposition Members will not be here. It does not mean however, that is a lack or interest, a lack of

unwillingness or that you are voluntarily absenting yourself from the work of the Senate.

Therefore, Sir, given the tradition, I would wish to urge that persons either follow it, or otherwise every time somebody on the Government Side, whether they are outside eating fish cakes or legitimately away from here, one would have to mention it.

Mr. President, I left my Chair to go to get a document to somebody who asked me to get it to them before the close of business today which is fast approaching. I do have a practice and a job that does require me from time to time not to be in my Chair or to be away from the Chamber, but I do try to treat the Chair with the courtesy which I know the Chair is entitled.

Therefore, for people to be alluding to it and making comments as if I am not paying attention to the business, not only breaches the convention and courtesy but, really, is not even close to the truth.

Asides.

Mr. PRESIDENT: Your point of privilege is taken. I draw to your attention for what it is worth that on the occasion when you did communicate with the Chair that you would be out of the country the matter was reported to the Senate.

The record will show that on the last occasion the Senate met, an indication was made that Senator Thompson would be away from the country on official business. Therefore, I draw it to your attention for what it is worth, but I also want to put it in the record because you have correctly raised the question of your privilege. I will merely point out from the Chair that all Honourable Senators are entitled to be away from this Chamber from time to time, as long as they do not make it consecutive, and they stay within the four corners of the Standing Orders of this Chamber. Your point of privilege is taken.

4.10 p.m.

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN: Mr. President, I was seeking to provide some information. Sir, when we were treated to some numbers, perhaps, it is important for the record to speak to those numbers. Sir, Senator Thompson made reference to a number of projects, including Joint Venture Programmes between the National Housing Corporation and some partners in the Joint Venture Programme. Sir, perhaps in looking at those projects, I should share with you some information which I researched in term of the status of the programme.

We would have had, for example, eight developers. Reference was made to Coverley,Christ Church. In that area there were two developers, one who would have been provided with 87 lots, with 42 houses to be constructed. The date of the agreement for those would have been in January 12, 2003; commencement was in November 2003.

Sir, at the beginning of February 2009 - let us remember commencement would have been in 2003 - the contractor has completed only one house. Therefore, we cannot count 42 houses in that total.

The second developer had a total of 44 houses and the contract was signed on September 18, with the commencement date November. Of those 44 houses, 3 houses were completed as of the beginning of this month, 9 houses were under construction and the lease had expired. The lease had expired because the arrangement with the National Housing Corporation in this Joint Venture Programme was to provide a five-year lease, rather than what would have been the traditional arrangement. Sir, I could go on to list these projects.

Mr. President, of those projects, two of them related to low-income development, or starter homes, as the Honourable Senator from the Other Side has chosen to describe. There was greater success there. Again, in Coverley, the portion which would have applied to houses at the lower price scale, there were 20 allocated to one developer. That company or organisation was able to complete l5 houses, with two under construction when the lease expired.

In the second instance in Coverley, there were 25 houses, with 7 completed. The contractor has indicated that he no longer has any interest in constructing the additional homes. Sir, we could go through and do that kind of analysis because I think when we spew out numbers, those numbers are not necessarily relating to the actual situation to what has transpired. That was the plan, so when we list those numbers that was the plan.

Mr. President, let us remember I made reference to l4 years versus less than l4 months and, by contrast, if you do some analysis and come up with a status report of the Housing Every Last Person (HELP) programme that has been implemented over the past year, you would find that in respect of the provision of parcels of land, the current Government, the Minister of Housing and Lands, would have submitted to the Town Planning Department a number of lots, totalling 213 in places such as Branchbury, St. Joseph; Todds, St. George and Cherry Grove, St. John for approval.

Mr. President, in essence, the Ministry of Housing and Lands has done its part. It is now awaiting Town Planning Department permission to finalise the process.

In a similar vein, if you look at the question of the construction of houses, you would see that substantial units have been started. The Minister of Housing and Lands in the Other Place has reported that in excess of l00 houses have been started and soon to be turned over. Sir, I believe when we start to talk numbers, we want to be honest and realistic about those numbers.

Mr. President, the reality is that this initiative that we are proposing to support in the form of the amendment is one which is part of an ongoing programme which has already started, the execution of which is going smoothly and efficiently. Sir, we are delivering.

Mr. President, I would just want to use a couple of numbers that would have been used by Senator Symmonds. Senator Symmonds made reference to 2 519 housing solutions between l994 and 2007. Sir, if you work that out at l3 years, it works out to an average of 193 houses a year. If you work it at l4 years, it works out at 179.9 houses a year, which is approximately 180 houses per year. Sir, compare that with the statistics that we have seen in l4 months and you would see there is a serious commitment to housing the people who most need help.

I do not believe that I need to go any further than that, but when people like to play with numbers. I will not play with them. I will use them to demonstrate the correct picture and not to play a fantasy scenery, that is not my nature. I believe there is a commitment to deliver housing in an efficient manner.

There were several mistakes made in relation to Coverley, Blackman, St. Joseph, and a number of areas called under the previous Administration. We recognised what happened there and it is certainly not part of the policy of this Government to countenance any such problem.

Mr. President, it is unfortunate that a number of Barbadians suffered significantly, in terms of money tied up with contractors, monies lost to contractors, and families suffering severely because of those things. We have committed, as part of an open and transparent Government, one which is accountable to people, to live up to our pledges.

Sir, anybody who wants to take this Government to task after l4 months on a record which, as you look at performance to date so far, if you prorate the record over l4 years, would see that this record far surpasses that of the previous Administration. Anybody wanting to do that would really be engaging in fantasy.

Mr. President, on that note, I believe that with the work of my colleagues, I have demonstrated that this initiative to amend the VAT legislation, to accommodate the VAT rebate is one which must be commended, one which has been lauded by the people of Barbados. Sir, it is one of the initiatives, though small in terms of the total package of housing programme, is one that will go a long way to making a big difference. It is a small component of our total programme but it makes a big difference for those individuals who are benefitting.

Mr. President, a $10 000 rebate is certainly by no means a small sum of money, and certainly in these times. Sir, I heard unfortunate comments about the numbers of persons who are losing jobs. Sir, I would want to say that is a reality, but that it is not peculiar to Barbados only. Barbados, by and large to date, given the openness of our economy, has been weathering the storm. This Government is anticipating that the storm clouds would some time burst, there would be a deluge, the waters will come and as citizens we would have to deal with that, but to speak of it in terms as if this Government has been doing something wrong, to speak as if this Government is wrecking havoc with this economy is not only reckless...

We hear the comments made in other places and on political platforms, but I believe that, at the end of the day, if people are serious about the interest of Barbados and Barbadians, we would be guarded in our comments. I believe that we would be honest and up front, mature and truthful. Sir, I trust that people would recognise that as part of this programme we are seeking to create opportunities for Barbadians to remain in work.

We are seeking to create opportunities so that Barbadians would have the opportunity to access one of the most precious resource that this little 166 square miles island has and that is the land which is the basis of creating wealth for poor people.

Mr. President, those persons who have been ignored by the previous policies, are not being ignored anymore and this particular piece of legislation, along with a lot of the other things that we have started to do and will continue to do over the next four remaining years, are going to demonstrate that at the heart of all that is being done by this current Administration is an interest in the welfare of Barbadians, particularly those who find themselves at the lower levels of the income ladder, those who find themselves most vulnerable those who, at the end of the day, would be taken care of in ways that will make a difference to their very existence.

4.20 p.m.

SENATOR the Hon. MISS M. P. O. McCLEAN: Mr. President, on that note, I support this amendment.

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

The question was put to the Senate and agreed to.

On the motion of SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN, the SENATE resolved itself into Committee on the Bill, Madam Deputy President in the Chair.

COMMITTEE

MADAM DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The Senate is in Committee.

Clauses 1 - 3 inclusive were called and passed.

The Schedule became the Schedule to the Bill.

On the motion of SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN, Madam DEPUTY PRESIDENT reported the passing of one Bill in Committee and Mr. PRESIDENT resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

On the separate motions of SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN, the Bill was read a third time and passed and cited as the Value Added Tax (Amendment) Act, 2009.

ADJOURNMENT

SENATOR the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McCLEAN: Mr. President, I beg to move that this Sitting be adjourned sine die.

The question that the Senate do now adjourn sine die was put to the SENATE and agreed to and Mr. PRESIDENT adjourned the Senate accordingly.

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McCLEAN, Senator the Hon. Miss M. P. O.
SANDIFORD-GARNER, Senator Mrs. V. I.
SYMMONDS, Senator K. D.
THOMPSON, Senator MISS H. E.
TROTMAN, Senator SIR ROY

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EDITORIAL NOTES — NOT PART OF THE REPORT

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

EDITORIAL QUERIES

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

Q1. *Order No. 1, size of the rebate.* Speakers describe the relief differently: the Leader of the Senate speaks of 'a 7 per cent rebate on the total cost of the house' worth about $10 000, Senator Dr. F. L. Chandler of '7.5 per cent', and Senator the Hon. D. W. Boyce of 'the refund of 70 per cent of the value of the house' before going on to explain a figure of 7 per cent. Printed as in the source.

Q2. *Order No. 1, Senator Miss H. E. Thompson.* The mortgage figures quoted from Central Bank reports appear to mix units: the 'accumulative mortgage market' is given as '$9.493 million' in 1991, '$4.6 million' in 1994, '$26 981 million' in 2000 and '$29 million' in 2002, and later as '$1.5 billion, when we had found them at $4.620 million'. Printed as in the source.

Q3. *Suspension of Sitting.* The speech label reads 'SENATOR THE HON. MISS M. O. P. McCLEAN' (initials reversed) and is followed only by '. . .' before the motion to suspend. Printed as in the source.

Q4. *Order No. 1, Senator K. D. Symmonds.* Two of Senator K. D. Symmonds's paragraphs are addressed to 'Mr. Speaker' although the Senate is sitting under Mr. President. Printed as in the source.

Q5. *PRESENT list.* The Minister of Agriculture appears as 'SENATOR the Hon. H. L. BENN' in the PRESENT list and as 'H. LaV. BENN' in his speech labels; Senator the Very Reverend H. E. Crichlow's degree is given as 'Duenelm'. Printed as in the source.

DEBATE SUMMARY

(Editorial summary — not part of the record.)

The Senate met on Wednesday, 25th February, 2009 at 11.10 a.m., with the President, Senator Dr. B. M. Taitt, in the Chair; prayers were led by the Very Rev. H. E. Crichlow. The only item of business was Order No. 1, the Value Added Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2009.

The Leader of the Senate, Senator the Hon. Miss M. P. O. McClean, moved the Bill, which gives first-time homeowners VAT relief on houses valued up to $150 000. She said the relief worked out at a rebate of about 7 per cent of the cost of the house, approximately $10 000, for families with gross annual income not exceeding $42 000, and that it sat alongside 500 house lots identified for first-time owners at $5 a square foot. Acknowledging that VAT relief up to $400 000 had been promised, she said a responsible Government must deliver its promises in a measured way.

Senator K. D. Symmonds said the Opposition did not oppose the concept, which he traced to the Barbados Labour Party's Housing Incentive Act, but criticised the retreat from the $400 000 pledge, the halting of free transfers of National Housing Corporation units, the land tax increases and other unmet promises; he said 876 houses had been under way when the present Government took office. The President reminded him that he could address only the Chair. On a point of order Senator McClean said she hoped he would be honest, and the President found nothing wrong in that. Senator Sir Roy Trotman supported the Bill but argued that the $150 000 cut-off was low, spoke of VAT penalties on companies awaiting Government payments, and proposed that trade unions take part in providing housing.

Senator Mrs. V. I. Sandiford-Garner supported the Bill as social justice and criticised the Primary Homes Programme; after a point of order from Senator Symmonds the President asked her to rephrase a remark, and she apologised. After the luncheon suspension Senator Dr. F. L. Chandler welcomed the measure but called for prompt refunds, citing a farmer owed over $70 000. Senator the Hon. D. W. Boyce described the Government's wider programme, including $10 million for industry promotion and $15 million for the tourism relief fund; the President found no point of order in Senator Symmonds's objection that this was not relevant. Senator R. O. Marville suggested a limit of about $170 000, and Senator the Hon. H. LaV. Benn complained of delays and the attitude of some officers in paying refunds.

Senator Miss H. E. Thompson said the measure fell far short of the promise and set out the former Government's housing record, including increases to the General Workers' Loan Scheme to $69.9 million for 5 636 persons, 100 per cent mortgages, land at $2.50 a square foot in urban tenantries, 3 578 houses at named developments and a land bank of 535 acres. Senator D. McD. Alleyne replied with force, prompting points of order from Senator Symmonds and a request from the President that he address the Chair, and urged the Government to raise the limit in stages to $400 000. Senator Thompson then raised a point of privilege about comments on her absence, saying she had written to the Chair about work abroad; the President said her absence had been reported to the Senate.

Replying, Senator McClean gave the progress of joint-venture developments at Coverley, where one developer had completed one of 42 houses, and contrasted the former Government's 14 years with the present Government's 14 months. The Bill was read a second time, passed in Committee with the Deputy President in the Chair, and read a third time as the Value Added Tax (Amendment) Act, 2009. The Senate was adjourned sine die.