



GRENADA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SECOND SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

THURSDAY 25TH APRIL, 2024

***The Sitting of the House of Representatives
held on Thursday 25th April, 2024
at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's***

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Attendance

PRESENT

Mr. Speaker
Honourable Leo Cato, MP
in the Chair

- | | |
|--|--|
| Honourable Dickon Mitchell, MP
<i>(St. David)</i> | - Prime Minister & Minister for National Security, Home Affairs, Information, Disaster Management & Public Administration, Infrastructure and Physical Development, Public Utilities & Civil Aviation and Transportation |
| Honourable Philip A. Telesford, MP
<i>(St. George South-East)</i> | - Minister for Health |
| Honourable Lennox John Andrews, MP
<i>(St. Andrew South West)</i> | - Minister for Economic Development, Planning and Co-operatives, Agriculture & Lands, Forestry and Marine Resources |
| Honourable Tevin Andrews, MP
<i>(Carriacou & Petite Martinique)</i> | - Ministry of Carriacou, Petite Martinique Affairs and Local Government |
| Honourable Dennis Cornwall, MP
<i>(St. Patrick East)</i> | - Minister for Finance |
| Honourable Ron Livingston Redhead, MP
<i>(St. George North-East)</i> | - Member |
| Honourable Delma Thomas, MP
<i>(St. Andrew North-West)</i> | - Minister for Mental Health, Wellness, and Religious Affairs, with a special focus on the Mt. Gay Psychiatric Hospital |
| Honourable Andy Williams, MP
<i>(St. George South)</i> | - Minister for Mobilisation, Implementation and Transformation |
| Honourable. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen, MP
<i>(St. Mark)</i> | - Deputy Speaker |
| Honourable Peter David, MP
<i>(Town of St. George)</i> | - Member |
| Honourable Kate Lewis-Peters, MP
<i>(St. Andrew North-East)</i> | - Member |
| Honourable Emmalin Pierre, MP
<i>(St. Andrew South-East)</i> | - Member |

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Attendance

ABSENT

Honourable Joseph Andall, MP
(St. Patrick West)

- Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade & Export
Development
(Excuse tendered)

Honourable Kerryne Z. James, MP
(St. John)

- Minister for Climate Resilience, the
Environment and Renewable Energy
(Excuse tendered)

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith C. Mitchell, PC, MP, JP
(St. George North-West)

- Leader of His Majesty's Opposition
(Excuse tendered)

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***Prayers
Minutes***

The Sitting of the House of Representatives began at 9:02 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Let's pray.

(House Prayer was said)

Mr. Speaker: Join me as we say the Lord's Prayer.

(The Lord's Prayer was said)

Mr. Speaker: Pray be seated. This Honourable House now commences.

(Sound of gavel)

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 3 – Oath of Allegiance or Affirmation of a new Member
Item 4 – Confirmation of Minutes.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, please give me a moment, let me...

Mr. Speaker: All right. Honourable Leader of Government's Business. Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Sitting of the House of Representatives held at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's on Tuesday, the 26th of March 2024 at 9 a.m., be taken as read.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Leader of Government's Business.

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***Minutes
Announcements***

Question put and agreed to.

Minutes taken as read.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Sitting of the House of Representatives held at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's on Tuesday, the 26th of March 2024 at 9 a.m., be confirmed.

Question put and agreed to.

Minutes confirmed.

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 5 – Messages from the Governor-General.
Item 6 – Announcements by Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Madam Assistant Clerk. I wish to say that I have in my possession correspondence that shows the Honourable Kerryne James is attending a Caribbean Renewable Energy Forum in Miami, and as such will be absent from today's Sitting.

I also have, from the Office of Leader of His Majesty's Opposition, correspondence that shows the Leader of the Opposition is now attending a conference of the Caribbean Cricket Board in Trinidad and Tobago, so he too will be absent from today's Sitting.

I am also informed that the Honourable Joseph Andall is away in Venezuela on official State Business and as such would not be here with us today.

So, those Members will be absent from today's Sitting, but we wish them well in their various assignments out of this country. Those are my announcements.

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 7 – Presentation of Petitions.

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***Presentations of Papers / Reports
Statements by Ministers***

Item 8 – Presentation of Papers and Reports from Select
Committees.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to lay on the Table the following Papers and Reports before this Honourable House:

1. Grenada Council for Technical and Vocational Education (GCTVET) National Training Agency (NTA), Annual Report 2022;
2. Fiscal Resilience Oversight Committee (FROC) 2023 Annual Report;
3. FROC 2023 Annual Report at a Glance; and
4. FROC Annex to 2023 Annual Report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Leader of Government's Business. Honourable Members, those documents are now laid in Parliament.

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 9 – Unopposed Private Business.
Item 10 – Questions.

Mr. Speaker: We can proceed to the next item. The questions are in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, and those answers were submitted to Dr. Keith Mitchell. He is out of the Sitting today, and as such, we may proceed to the next item.

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 11 – Urgent Questions under the Provisions of Standing Order No. (20) (1) (Notice of Questions).
Item 12 – Statements by Ministers.

Mr. Speaker: I see two lights on. All right. Is it, Honourable MP for St. Andrew

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North West? Is it your light?

Hon. Delma Thomas: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: All right. Please do.

Hon. Delma Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleasant, good morning to everyone. Mr. Speaker, I stand here this morning to update this Honourable House on the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Religious Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, let me start by applauding our Honourable Prime Minister for establishing a standalone Ministry of Mental Health and Wellness, recognising the crucial importance of prioritising mental health in our country. This initiative signifies a profound step towards destigmatising mental health issues and ensuring that adequate support and resources are provided to those in need.

Mental Health is foundational to overall well-being and productivity, and as a dedicated ministry, it underscores our commitment to promoting mental wellness to all our citizens. By investing in mental health services and awareness programmes, we are not only fostering healthier individuals but also building a stronger and more compassionate society. This bold move by our Prime Minister will undoubtedly have a positive and far-reaching impact on our nation's health and prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, on assuming the new role, the first thing that was done was an assessment of the Mental Health Systems in Grenada. This assessment was conducted by Dr. Stan Kutcher who's a Senator from Canada who has extensive experience in Mental Health as he's a doctor himself. He is a psychiatrist. And so, Mr. Speaker, he has done that assessment where he identified the strengths, weaknesses, gaps and challenges and so this assessment guided us or is guiding us as we start to really change the status score as we strive to provide better Mental Health Systems and services to the people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Mr. Speaker, what have we done thus far? At present, the Mt. Gay Mental

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Hospital, have many challenges, Mr. Speaker, many issues, but I must say that we are committed and so we are forging ahead, and so for the first time, we can now boast that we have a medical staff of seven maybe the most in more than 20 years as I think the Medical Director would have said. And so, Mr. Speaker, this speaks to commitment.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to work, to put plans and policies in place to ensure that we do not only focus on Mt. Gay Mental Hospital, which is very important and so we will do what it takes there, but we appreciate that our work as it relates to Mental Health and Wellness must be in the community and so we are preparing to roll out many community interventions in the month of May. So, Mr. Speaker, the Parliament will be updated on those services that will be rolled out. Training with our faith-based organisation will be held shortly in that period, also where we will be training them, so that as they interact with the community, they can assist us in what we do.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that we provide not only better services for our patients with mental health issues but also our staff at the Mt. Gay Mental Hospital, who also experience stigma and discrimination by the very fact that they are working at the organisation. We stay to them we are committed and we stand with you and we're working with you.

Mr. Speaker, to show the importance that this Government plays in Mental Health, last Monday, the entire Cabinet went to visit the Mt. Gay Hospital. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, this speaks volumes, and it speaks about commitment because when you see and feel what others are seeing and feeling, it gives you the impetus and the drive to assist. And so I want to say that every Member of the Cabinet at that time pledged and provided assistance so that we could purchase one mattress.

We know over the years, for all the time, we always hear about issues with mattresses because mental health is a different kind of issue, you purchase this year, and then they'll get damaged and all that. And so from the ministry's standpoint, we have ordered 30, but from the Cabinet's standpoint, 14 mattresses were also ordered, plus AC units and telephones. These were challenges identified by staff members, and so it means that we are forging ahead to make the work easier. And it's not that easy, Mr.

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Speaker, but it's to assist in the work at the Mt. Gay Mental Hospital. Our community programme will be launched in terms of staff going out, not only to look at patients, but to assist families in coping with that disease, the issue of stigma and the issue of discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, more will be announced in this Honourable House, but let me go to salute the Grenada Co-Operative Bank for its significant contribution of over EC\$500,000 towards assisting the Government in furnishing a Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre.

(Applause)

Following its construction, Mr. Speaker, this exemplary support from the private sector exemplifies a commendable partnership between business and Government in addressing crucial societal needs. The Co-Operative Bank and its partners' generous donation not only demonstrates Corporate Social Responsibility but also underscores a shared commitment to improving public health and social welfare. Such an initiative, Mr. Speaker, plays a vital role in fostering community development and promoting a culture of compassion and supporting individuals with addiction problems. This collaboration sets a positive precedent for future endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, as a Government, we are committed not only to accepting the money from the Grenada Co-Operative Bank and letting it sit in an account and dry, but we are committed to rebuilding what was known as the Carlton Home, a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts and alcohol addiction. **(Applause)** And so, Mr. Speaker, we have started.

I will leave here at 2:00 p.m. for an engagement at Mirabeau, the site that was identified, to say that we are in the process of doing a feasibility study. Our designs will be completed this year, and the clearing of the site will also be completed in 2024, to signal that we will start work in 2025. A Government, Mr. Speaker, that not only talks the talk, but walks the walk. **(Applause)**

We will, Mr. Speaker, after 20 years, after 20 years of the advent of Hurricane Ivan, where our centre was damaged, this new Government will rebuild a rehabilitation centre aimed at addiction so that our citizens with addiction problems can be reintegrated into society and will make meaningful contributions. Mr. Speaker, we'll continue to forge

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ahead as it relates to Mental Health and Wellness.

There's an old proverbial saying from the 19th century from a Minister of Government in France that is used regularly now in places like this, the Honourable House, "The difficult will do right now, as we are doing, the impossible will take a little longer, but will be done". Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North West. I see the light of the MP for St. Patrick East. Is it your light, Honourable MP...? Okay for Carriacou and Petite Martinique, I'm sorry. Please take the floor.

Hon. Tevin Andrews: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thought it was important that I stand to give a little update on matters relating to Carriacou and Petite Martinique's Ministry.

And I heard my Honourable friend, Mr. Speaker, and colleague talk about doing the impossible and what wasn't done in 20 years and all of that. And I'm also happy to join my Honourable friend, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the Ministerial Complex of Carriacou. It was destroyed by Hurricane Ivan over 20 years ago, and nothing has been done. It's a project, Mr. Speaker, that former administrations tried to get off the ground, rolling off the ground, but unfortunately, nothing of significance has been done.

But I'm happy to report, Mr. Speaker, that the work is basically completed in preparing to go to the tendering process. I think the only thing that's left to do now, that's left up to the Ministry of Carriacou and Petite Martinique and the technical team within Infrastructure, is to have a public consultation, and that's on the way. And as soon as that is completed, we then move to the tendering process to build this Ministerial Complex in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, bringing all the various divisions that are spread across Carriacou and Petite Martinique into one location to bring access to services, Government services to the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique. And so, soon, the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique will have access to services in one location without having to travel all over the place.

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So I just thought it was important to highlight this because we spoke about it for budget, the preparation of Budget 2023 and also 2024, but significant progress has been made both by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Carriacou and Petite Martinique. So I thought it was important to mention that.

The Fishing Centre for Windward, Mr. Speaker, also happy to report. It's a project that started in 2023, and of course, budgetary support was given for 2024, and significant progress has been. We're now 80% completed, and the intention is that by June, in time for our Fisherman Birthday Celebration, we will be able to open the Fishing Complex Centre in Windward so that the fishermen of Windward have better facilities at their disposal. The Fishing Centre would also include the necessary lockers and all of that good stuff for the fisher folks in Windward and surrounding areas.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure many of my friends in this Honourable House and, of course, you might have heard about the excellent news that by year-end we should be able to accommodate night landing at the Lauriston Airport in Carriacou. And I want to commend... **(Applause)** I want to publicly thank our Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, Minister for Civil Aviation, who is assisting in pushing and making sure that this becomes a reality, so we work closely to ensure that that happens. It's a promise that was made during our campaign, and I'm happy to finally see that "boots are on the ground" to make this a reality.

We have to understand the economic impact it will have on Carriacou and Petite Martinique now that we are on the verge of taking off to expand the economy up there, and I think it's a step in the right direction. So by year-end, we should or we will have a night landing in Carriacou or to accommodate a night landing at our airport, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I did not highlight an unfortunate situation which happened in Carriacou with the murder of a young child, Esther Paterson, and I want to use this opportunity to extend my sympathies to the family and, of course, to the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique, Mr. Speaker.

You know it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, as a Ministry, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, when we got in, we realised that the division of Social Development is grossly

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lacking adequate staff. And it's something that is dear to my heart because the Cabinet can tell you how much I advocate for beefing up staff within Social Development, because we really don't have staff. We don't have a counsellor. We don't have a programme officer. The only person that we have in the division of Social Development, Mr. Speaker, is one Social Worker who is responsible for both Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

But I am happy this Cabinet, this Government has taken the bold step of filling mission-critical positions within the division of Social Development that will help us to deal with some of the social problems that we have in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. So, there are two very important positions that are now open up. Working along with the Cabinet and various departments within the Government would soon have those positions filled, and we'll continue to work with the Cabinet and various Government departments to have more positions opened up so that some of the social issues can be tackled within Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

So, I'm not saying that having the various professionals like counsellors and others would help stop or prevent issues like this, but I know it will suddenly help in one way or the other. Because it's unfortunate that we have a department, but we don't have the staff and usually staff from Grenada have to come up to Carriacou to deal with matters in Carriacou or in Petite Martinique often times taken away from some of the critical things in Grenada and often times when the professionals come to Carriacou there is not much time and not much things they can do within the short space of time that they have to spend in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. So, the Ministry of Carriacou and Petite Martinique is tirelessly working to deal with some of those issues.

And again, I want to commend and thank the Minister for Social Development and thank the Cabinet for agreeing to push to ensure that the various departments, especially Social Development, are beefed up with the necessary staff. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Applause)

Mr. Speaker: Thank you to Honourable MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique. Honourable Prime Minister.

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Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just to update this House, really, that the necessary Statutory Rules and Order that will permit the extension of an upgrade from a B-Class, C-Class or C1-Class licence to a D-Class, where someone has been driving for five years or more in that particular class, will go into effect on Monday. The SR&O will be published in the Government of Grenada's *Gazette* **(applause)** on Friday. And so at a very small fee of EC\$35, which is the upgrade fee, the citizens of Grenada who've long been clamouring for the opportunity to upgrade their licence class from B to D or C to D or C1 to D will be able to do so upon paying the necessary upgrade fee of EC\$35 and upon being certified as being medically fit to drive.

So, I just want to make this known, and obviously, I know members of the public who've been waiting on this, particularly women who have their small businesses and may need to drive a pick-up or so, can therefore begin that process on Monday. So that's the first thing I want to point out, Mr. Speaker.

The second issue I just want to briefly highlight, Mr. Speaker, is that the Transport Commission is now fully commissioned. The Transport Commission is chaired by Mr. Francis Paul, Attorney-at-Law, and it consists of other commissioners. We intend, Mr. Speaker, shortly to introduce the Commission as well as the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission, who is being retained from Trinidad and Tobago to lead what I would call the "Revolution in Transportation" in Grenada that is so badly needed to address public transportation in Grenada.

We anticipate that if not this Tuesday, then by the following Tuesday, the Commission and the CEO will be introduced to the public, and we will begin to have the public engagement as to the plans, the stakeholders we need to address and to try and start tackling public transportation in Grenada. **(Applause)**

We anticipate, Mr. Speaker, there are some short-term issues we need to address; the St. George's Bus Terminus is run by the Grenada Port Authority. The Port Authority's speciality is not bus or public bus transportation, and I think we all know this has been a strain on their own human capacity. We have the Sauteurs Bus Terminal and the St. Andrew Bus Terminal, the Grenville Bus Terminal, both of which, Mr. Speaker, are not

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ideally being managed.

We intend and we've already started those engagements with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, the Ministry of Infrastructure, and the Grenada Port Authority to, in fact, have these terminals vested in the Transport Commission so that we could begin the process of really addressing the management of the terminals and public transportation. So, that's one of the short-term issues we will see to quickly address, Mr. Speaker.

The second issue, as we are aware, there are some parts of the island that are grossly underserved as a result of the fact that we have private owners and operators providing a public good, which is public transportation. So, places like St. Patrick and St. Mark suffer a lot as a result of that. In the case of St. Patrick and St. Mark, practically the west coast is compounded by the challenge of the Molinere Landslip. And so, you would see, Mr. Speaker, anytime from four in the afternoon to six, there's significant overcrowding at the bus terminal, particularly for persons who have to get to that part. If you go on the Carenage, you would also see massive crowds gathered at the Carenage waiting to get a bus to go up the eastern flank of St. David.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have begun the engagement with the Bus Owners Association. We wish to encourage the actual formalisation and the creation of a legal entity that actually is the National Bus Owners Association, so that all of the bus owners can belong to this association, so that it becomes easier for the Government to treat with them.

As we aware, Mr. Speaker, the price of public transportation has remained fixed for almost a decade and a half. This is one sector that benefits from absolutely no Government support whatsoever; no concession on anything. Brakes, tires, gasoline, nothing and these private owners obviously take loans to buy their buses. So, when we talk about the dog-eat-dog world or the aggressive nature of the Bus Owners Association, Mr. Speaker, we only say so until we become a bus driver ourselves or until we become a bus owner ourselves. Because when you have to pay the bank and you have to feed your family, you probably would do anything for the extra EC\$1.50 or EC\$2.50, as the

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case may be.

So, it is not that a bus driver is inherently an aggressive person. It is because the system puts them into survival mode, and that survival mode has certain consequences. It becomes a pure cost-benefit analysis. It invariably leads to a race to the bottom. The quality of the service is not the best. The quality of the vehicles on the road is not the best.

One of the challenges the bus owners are facing, Mr. Speaker, is that sometimes there are just no buses available, as in the people who import and sell buses are not doing so, so there are no buses to buy. So, the average age of the buses on the road is getting older and older. The net effect of that is that you have safety issues, and I think we know of a few tragic instances where bus brakes have failed and buses have ended up in the sea, people have died, etcetera. So, Mr. Speaker, we recognise that this situation can continue.

A lot of the businesses in the hospitality sector, the hotels, call centres and even restaurants, have to find transportation to take their staff to and from home or their businesses would collapse at an enormous cost. The hospital has provided bus transportation to nurses and security guards, so we could go on and on.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm saying all of this to say that we have a significant challenge on our hands. We will tackle this challenge with all stakeholders: Labour, the Employers Federation, the Chambers of Commerce, the Bus Owners' Association, and the taxi drivers. We have hundreds, if not thousands, of hired vehicles that are rented, but they are usually rented only at Christmas time, Easter time, and Carnival time; the rest of the time, they're sitting there.

We have to find a collaborative approach to solve the transportation situation in Grenada because, without it, the economy will not grow. It will stagnate. Our social mobility will also stagnate, and the significant traffic jam that we already have on these small roads, which were not meant for this amount of traffic, is something we also would have to address.

But I would conclude on this note, Mr. Speaker, to say there is one specific area

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we will also seek to commence, all things being equal, piloting in September, and that is our school children. We cannot continue a situation where our school children... First of all, Mr. Speaker, because the price is less than that of our adult, I think we all know that bus owners, if they have to choose between a child and an adult, they'll take the adult because it feeds more, and the cost of providing the service is the same whether it's an adult or a child. So, that already puts our children at a significant disadvantage in terms of their own ability to get to school on time, to get to school on time, etc.

Second, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique talked about the social workers and the danger that our school children, and our children oftentimes face from adults and public transportation is one such risk, Mr. Speaker. We are putting our children, often times, by themselves at 11, 12, 13 for long distances on public transportation, where there is absolutely no vetting of the people who are on that bus or who come in contact with them. And, it's quite easy to pick up the children's route, they have to go from home to school, and from school to home. So, if there are suspected people who want to prey on children, a person who wants to harass, intimidate or abuse children, it's quite easy for them to check the routine of the children and to find themselves on the same bus or buses that the children travel on.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at this stage and engaging with the Ministry of Education, the Bus Owners Association and our partners to potentially run a pilot. A pilot at this stage, Mr. Speaker, because we need to know whether it will work to see whether or not we can provide dedicated transportation to our school children in some school areas, some school districts, to study to see if it will work, and then to come back to the public to see whether we can, in fact create a dedicated public schools bus system for our children. **(Applause)**

So, Mr. Speaker, that's the update. The Transport Commission will be introduced to the public, if not this Tuesday, the following Tuesday, be mindful that Wednesday is May Day. So, I'd likely, probably have it the following Tuesday, but I thought that, as the Minister responsible for Transportation, I should provide this update to the House. Thank you. **(Applause)**

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Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister, for this update. The applause tells you the value of the update. Is it Honourable MP for St. Patrick East?

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, Members of this Honourable House.

I rise this morning to specifically talk about, very briefly, the Fiscal Resilience Act that was laid. The document that was laid. The Annual Report was laid in Parliament today, and I think it would be remiss of me if I did not make a few comments on it.

First of all, let me thank the Fiscal Responsibility Oversight Committee, headed by one of our Grenadian colleagues, Ms. Laurel Bain, who was a former employee of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. Again, most committee members are professional Grenadians who have worked at the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the Eastern Caribbean Home Mortgage Bank. And also, I want to mention Dr. Juliet Melville, who's also a development partner in this whole committee.

Now, earlier this year, we basically repeal and replace the Fiscal Responsibility Act with the Fiscal Resilience Act, and that was done to basically do a number of things, to remove most of the ambiguities that existed in the Fiscal Responsibility Act and to make it more easier for Government to operate, and to make sure that we can be compliant for the most part with some of the indicators that we have actually placed in that report.

So, I wish to commend the FROC, for being able to at least present to the Parliament, that report and to show that we are about serious responsibility and business in the Parliament, to make sure that the Government and the people of Grenada are able to at least share the information that contains therein.

One of the things I am concerned about, though, Mr. Speaker, is that for many, many, many years we have had outstanding reports to be laid in Parliament. I'm talking about the Audit Financial Reports that need to be laid in Parliament. I think we are about seven years or more in arrears, because I think we looked at 2016 to now. Those reports have not been laid in Parliament.

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While, for example, that we have been trying to put in place a number of measures to ensure that these reports can be done in a timely basis and be presented to the House, so that the Government and people of Grenada is aware of what is happening in Government, we are not there as yet. Therefore, my commitment, along with the staff at the Ministry of Finance and the Audit Department, is to forge ahead to continue making sure that, sooner than later, we are able to at least present this House with those outstanding Audit Financial Reports. Again, we may need to basically seek assistance from outside, when I say outside, not to do the auditing per se, but to give us some guidance in how we go about getting that done in the most efficient and speedy time.

And, therefore, Mr. Speaker, I thought it was prudent to mention this here today, so that we can, at some point in time, toot our horns and say that we have actually achieved our objectives in making sure that timely and updated reports are laid in Parliament. I thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Patrick East. I sense we have no other statements, so we can now proceed to the next item.

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 13 – Personal Explanations.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable MP for St. Mark.

Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise on this agenda item to raise a matter where I am implicated personally, so bear with me, Mr. Speaker, while I explain how I am. It will take a little, but it wouldn't surpass the time allotted.

Mr. Speaker, as you well noted, the Leader of the Opposition is absent today, and as you also said, he is absent because he has been invited to an important meeting on cricket by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. If we are honest with ourselves, we know why and because of his previous involvement in cricket. So, Mr. Speaker, this

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invitation came more than two weeks ago, and it came before the notice of this Sitting was sent.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill that is being presented today, the Electronic Communications Bill, is of critical importance. A very detailed Bill, very long, but important because we're all into that kind of phase where we moved from—it used to be GRENTEL—into now all kinds of different ways of communication. And, it is important to us as MPs, but it is very important to the broader cross-section of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and whether they're local, whether they're foreign, but who play a role in communications in Grenada. And I'm sure, the Leader of the Opposition would have liked to be here to make his own contribution.

Mr. Speaker, however, we cannot ignore the importance of West Indies Cricket to us as a Member State of the Caribbean. Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that other members have been absent at other times because they have clashes with their personal schedules and the scheduling of Parliament. And very early after elections in our Sittings, one of the recommendations that was made was that there be prior dialogue between the Leader of Government's Business and me, I can't say why me, I can't say why me, but I was suggested, and as a humble servant, I agreed.

And that meant that the dialogue for the dates should be a little bit more, or outside the required seven days. We know there's a seven-day notice, but if there has to be meaningful dialogue, it has to be after the notice is sent out, because then it may not be necessary, and whatever has to happen could have happened. Case in point with the Leader of the Opposition, it was two weeks before, and then I remember Honourable Emmaline Pierre had a situation where her hands were tied in terms of a commitment that she had made.

And therefore, as one half of the party that was supposed to have early dialogue and to disseminate information on the upcoming meeting, so that we could reschedule. We all know that all politics is local, and our Parliament is perhaps paramount to everything or most other things, and we need to give it that kind of attention. But there are times when commitments are made, and it is very difficult to extricate oneself from

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the commitment, and one may find it necessary to do so.

And there are not many, but it's just that when it does happen, it becomes a painful decision for whoever it happens with, and my colleague on the "Other Side", Leader for Government's Business, we have had dialogue before, but sometimes it drops. I have mentioned that on other occasions, sometimes it drops, and I know everybody is busy, and one can forget. So, I am not here to throw blame.

However, I am just standing here to ask that we give consideration to this recommendation, suggestion, whatever it is that was made here in this very Honourable House, and maybe if we need to regurgitate and re-discuss and come up with a way, so be it. But, we, on "This Side", and I'm sure my colleague Members on the "Other Side", we want to be here and we need to be here at the right time. But, if we could just have a little heads up sometime, outside of and beyond the seven days when we normally would get notice, it will facilitate our presence here.

Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying here does not deny the Government's prerogative, and I want to make that very clear. We are clear on "This Side". I am very clear that it is the Government's prerogative to schedule the Sitting, and to bring the Bills that they see fit, and we respect that. So that is not the issue. But, we're just asking, so let me maximise the participation of everyone so that the Bill does get maybe our humble suggestions, recommendations, whatever our participation brings to the Table. So that Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique can benefit from all of the representations that we have here, all 15 of us, as often as possible.

We are aware there are times when two persons are unavoidably absent, but in the last situation, I know the agony that the Leader of the Opposition went through, and then he said, well, you know, since he had given his commitment weeks ago.

So, I urge and I beg, that there'll be a little earlier dialogue and if we need to discuss it again maybe in chambers, maybe in another place, so that we can have a better harmonious understanding and a more concerted effort to ensure that all of us are here to do our work, and that certainly doesn't take away from the Government's right to make their decisions in their own time. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

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Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Mark. I was a little bit puzzled because I thought you rose under Personal Explanation. Right? Albeit, let's proceed to the next item.

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 14 – Motions.

Mr. Speaker: For item 14, you should have a Supplementary Order Paper in your position. Members, I do hope you have, at least on your system, a Supplementary Order Paper. So for Item 14, we will have to turn to that Supplementary. Leader for Government's Business.

(Leader of Government's Business and Honourable Dickon Mitchell discussed privately)

Mr. Speaker: Has everyone found the Supplementary? Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move a Resolution standing in my name. It reads as follows:

**RESOLUTION FOR THE PURPOSES OF SECTION 51A OF THE FIREARMS ACT,
CAP. 105.**

WHEREAS it is provided by section 51A of the Firearms Act Cap. 105 (hereinafter referred to as "the Act") that the Minister responsible for Home Affairs may, by Order subject to affirmative resolution, declare a firearms amnesty if the Minister is satisfied that—

- (a) the amnesty may result in the reduction of illegally possessed firearms or ammunition in Grenada; and
- (b) it is in the public interest to declare the amnesty;

WHEREAS on the 16th day of April 2024, the Minister was satisfied that a firearms

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amnesty may result in the reduction of illegally possessed firearms or ammunition in Grenada and that it was in the public interest to declare an amnesty and therefore made the Firearms (Firearms Amnesty) Order, 2024;

AND WHEREAS it is expedient that the Firearms (Firearms Amnesty) Order, 2024, which seeks to declare a firearms amnesty in the State of Grenada for the period commencing on the 1st day of May 2024 and ending at 12:00 a.m. on the 30th day of July 2024, be approved by the House of Representatives;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that pursuant to section 51A of the Act, the Firearms (Firearms Amnesty) Order, 2024, as set out in the Schedule to this Resolution, is hereby approved by the House of Representatives.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Leader of Government's Business. Honourable MP for the Town of St. George, is it your light?

Hon. Peter David: Just a question, Mr. Speaker. Could we speak on it now, or do I have to await your...

Mr. Speaker: We'll speak after.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Leader for Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, this Resolution is offering an amnesty for a period of 90 days, as stated earlier. It begins on the 1st of May, 2024 and ends 90 days thereafter, that's being the 30th of July, 2024. This Motion, Mr. Speaker, sets out certain conditions for the surrender of these firearms and subsequently the reduction of illegal weapons in the nature of firearms in our society.

It is well known, Mr. Speaker, that we have had in recent months an upsurge in

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these illegal weapons in our society. And, as a caring and responsible Government, Mr. Speaker, our approach is to do all in our power to seek to reduce these illegal weapons, especially amongst our young men.

Mr. Speaker, the consequences of these weapons and the temptation to use these weapons on each other result in most instances death, and of course, these weapons are used to conduct illegal activities like the trading of narcotic substances and robbery, as the case may be.

Mr. Speaker, if Grenada have to advance, we must ensure that we have an orderly society and a society that abides with the law or the laws that govern our beautiful spice island state, Pure Grenada. And it is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, Grenada is indeed one of the most beautiful islands, maybe, on the planet, and so we have to preserve its natural beauty and we have to preserve the peace and tranquillity that we have become known for over the years. We have to continue, Mr. Speaker, to make our contribution in that regard.

So the conditions, Mr. Speaker, that surround this motion are as follows: No one who surrenders, or in the act of surrendering, these weapons, Mr. Speaker, will be prosecuted. They are allowed to do so in absolute anonymity and will not be required to disclose any information pertaining to the possession of the firearm.

A person may also surrender Firearms and ammunition through their attorney at law, and, Mr. Speaker, we are well familiar with attorneys who seek to maintain peace. And so, we believe it is wise, Mr. Speaker, that those in possession of the firearms, these illegal weapons, who do not feel comfortable going directly to the police may so do by surrendering them to an attorney. And that is the main reason, Mr. Speaker, for this insertion, for this condition. But we want to be very clear, Mr. Speaker, that after the expiration of this amnesty period, anyone found or held in possession of these illegal weapons shall face mandatory prison sentences with no bail options.

This is important, Mr. Speaker, because for far too long our citizens have been crying out and asking the question that somebody found in possession of arms and ammunition, even committing a crime with those weapons, are allowed bail. This

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condition, Mr. Speaker, of no bail is sending a very strong message to those who believe they can purchase, use, sell and possess illegal weapons; they must now know that if they are found, there would be absolutely no option of bail. **(Applause)**

Of course, they can, Mr. Speaker, deliver these weapons at the nearest police station. As a matter of fact, I think there are actually designated police stations for this purpose and that is captured, I believe, somewhere in the Schedule; to the Officer in Charge or another officer so appointed by the Officer in Charge, just in case that particular officer is not available to receive the illegal weapon.

Very importantly, Mr. Speaker, a database of these illegal weapons and ammunition will be established, which we will collect very critical pieces of information, including the serial number, the type, the make, and the model of these weapons, so the data on these weapons will be kept for ballistic analysis.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has deemed it fitting not to compensate people for doing wrong and as such, no incentives would be provided to those in possession of these weapons. In other words, these weapons are not going to be purchased. We are not buying these weapons, nor are we providing any incentives for bad behaviour. So we got to get serious, Mr. Speaker. We have to be serious about what we want our society to be.

So, Mr. Speaker, all of these weapons so collected will be placed in a secured deposit bin under lock and key to ensure that they are properly accounted for and properly destroyed or disposed of at the appropriate time and under the appropriate instructions.

The Firearms Order of 2024 will come into force immediately upon publication in the Gazette, Mr. Speaker, to facilitate the commencement of the firearm amnesty as of May 1.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I commend this Motion to this Honourable House and ask for your support because I believe matters of this nature are certainly not a political one. These are matters of urgent national interest that we must respond to as caring and responsible citizens, and so I ask this Honourable House to support this Resolution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

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Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Leader of Government's Business. I now invite the MP for the Town of St. George to take the floor.

Hon. Peter David: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make some comments on the Motion elaborated on by my friend from St. George South East.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, when the Bill was brought, when the issue was raised earlier in Parliament, I had some concerns, we had some concerns, but we supported the amnesty, and I said then and I repeat now. While I have concerns about the ability of this amnesty to really go very far in solving the issue of gun crimes, I believe it sends a good message. A good message to the country that we have an issue. I repeat that. We support the gun amnesty. I have no difficulty with it. The question is, does it go far enough? And, of course, I know the Minister for National Security would say this is just one step, and I agree with that. I have no difficulty with that.

I heard the Member for South East indicate that they would never do a buy-back. I, on the last occasion, indicated that in many jurisdictions it has been difficult for amnesties to be effective without some incentive to those who have the gun.

I have been practising criminal law for the last 30 years, and I have seen that there has to be an incentive. I have participated, and I am glad now that attorneys are allowed to carry guns and collect guns because I have done it before. I keep doing it. I sometimes wonder if I am doing something illegal by having it in my possession during the transition period, and somebody set me up, and I get locked up during that transition period.

But I am happy to hear that in the amnesty period, we, as attorneys, are allowed to transfer guns from the possessor to the police. We have done it on many, many occasions, and that is well known. I have been taking guns off the street for a long time. I do believe that we should consider incentives. The Member very forcefully said they will never incentivise, well, you know, incentives are a thing.

The key issue is how to get the guns off the street, not to catch the people with the guns; that's not the amnesty. The amnesty presupposes that the person who is giving the gun is allowed to go about his or her business. So, I still believe that we should look

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at it while this amnesty is going on, do some analysis of the effectiveness of the amnesty and prepare to make adjustments if necessary, because, Mr. Speaker, this issue of guns is a serious one, very serious. It is not something to grandstand about or to make political mileage about. It is something we need to solve. I see it every day, and as I said, the people with the guns and the victims of the guns, both families, are seriously affected.

So I want us to... I agree with the amnesty, whether or not it is three months; I am sure at the end of three months, we can come back and determine whether or not we need to review it, whether or not we need to extend it, and what we need to do to make it effective. But I agree with the gun amnesty, but we must do more.

With respect to doing more, I want to say that we as Members of Parliament. We must do more in our communities for that. I have met with several of the people. In fact, just two days ago, I had a meeting with some young people discussing issues like this. But we as MPs must do it in our communities.

I want to welcome a call I received yesterday from my friend from the South, because as all of us are well aware, there are feuds going on within various communities and not only in the South. In St. John, all over the country, there are these pockets of feuds taking place, and the Member for the South said we must meet to talk about it, and I welcome that. Because he has issues in the South. We have issues in the Town. There are issues in St. Andrew; issues in St. John.

We, as Members of Parliament, should join in that initiative that we are embarking upon to try to take guns off the streets. Not only because it's good politically, but it is good for our communities, which is what we're here to solve. So we would be reaching out. My minister and I will need to talk about it because we need to make it a bipartisan initiative to take guns off the street. Our families are affected by it. Our communities are affected by it. So we are going to be reaching on after discussions to see what can be done.

I welcome the issue of anonymity because there was some comments made in the Senate recently that caused a whole wave in the communities because it was said without explanation that when the guns are delivered they will be ballistic test and there will be

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used in evidence. And, of course, I live in that zone people are saying well listen if you bring it in I don't know where the gun come from to come, I get it from somebody else, I myself would face consequences.

We must be careful not to make statements like that because what you're saying is if somebody brings in a gun and that gun has some history the person who brought it in can face consequences that was said in the Senate. It's in the news. I am glad there is some clarification in the actual Order which gives some anonymity, but I think you should go further to clear that up because that is going to be... You said you're not incentivising, that is going to be what we call a disincentive to get guns off the street.

Mr. Speaker, an issue that just arose is that we have a separation of powers. I want to make a comment, and I'm not suggesting any solution after we finish here. The Government can clearly pass other legislation that falls within its remit, but for a Member of Parliament to stand in Parliament and indicate when bail will or will not be granted is an absolute overreach. It is saying to the judiciary, we in Parliament decide when people get bail. I have been practising for 30-something years. Bail is decided by judges and magistrates, in some jurisdictions by JPs. Please refrain from making comments that appear to be intimidating to magistrates and judges.

How will a magistrate have a case in front of them where they believe bail should be permitted, and a Member of Parliament sits and says no bail should be granted in these kinds of matters? What does that say to the magistrate or judge? I know the Prime Minister was a practising attorney and he should advise. There are Attorneys from the Attorney General's Chamber sitting right behind you, Member. Please take advice from them before you make such comments that will ripple through the judiciary. We cannot sit here and simply, by a pronouncement, say no bail to anybody in this, that or other cases. Bail is granted, in law, by a magistrate and a judge where they see it as fit and proper. I see a light.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Leader of Government's Business.

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Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, when we treat these matters, we must appreciate that the law, and I think from experience, we all know that the respective legislation is going to be put in place to deal with that. So it is not a matter of intimidating anybody, and I think the Member must know these things. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP.

Hon. Peter David: I just interpreted what he said, Mr. Speaker, that they will be bringing legislation into this Parliament on when bail should or should not be granted. I look forward to that legislation, and I look forward to the debate on that legislation. If they are saying that they are bringing it, fine. He said, and the records are there, from after this, no bail. Now he is saying, he is not actually saying that, he is saying that the Government plans to bring legislation where they will be telling the judiciary when bail is or is not to be granted. I look forward to that if that's the position of the Government. And I put it on record, and if that's the position of the Government, fine. I look forward to that debate.

In the meantime, don't tell the judiciary anything about when and when not to give bail. Leave the judiciary alone. We are sliding into a dictatorial tendency when we believe we can sit here and decide how a case should be determined there. I am not saying that is the intent, but you know the road to hell is paved, sometimes with very good intentions. I say no more.

So, Mr. Speaker, back to the issue of the gun amnesty. We support the gun amnesty. We look forward to a report in three months. But I do believe, Mr. Speaker, that in three months there should be detailed statistics, detailed analysis so that in three months we come back and determine when we will, what has worked and what has not

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worked. But more importantly, I urge all the Members here to let us work together to solve the issue of crime. I agree with the Member for South East St. George, crime is a major issue for us, particularly in the context of our main industry, which is the tourism industry. If we have to slide into a situation where we have the kind of crime in Trinidad, the kind of crime in Jamaica, then certainly our economy will be affected.

And before I close, I just want to welcome a comment made by the Member for St. David on transportation. I absolutely believe and I have said that in Parliament over and over again, transportation should be seen as a pillar of the economy, without it, our country would not be able to advance. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for the Town of St. George. I think I see the light for St. George North East.

Hon. Ron Redhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join with the Leader of Government's Business in support...

Mr. Speaker: Just hold on, Honourable MP... just turn off your lights, please. Okay, go ahead.

Hon. Ron Redhead: ... in support of the Motion. I also want to join with the sentiments expressed by the Member for the town of St. George that we ought to be working together on this. But, Mr. Speaker, it must not underscore the important value of being serious towards this particular matter.

Now, it's either you go hard or you go home, and we are dealing, Mr. Speaker, with a situation where crime is getting out of hand in the sense relative to what we are accustomed to. And what we are saying is that as a Government and as Members of Parliament, our role is clearly defined. So, let me just allow the Member who I know is through you, Mr. Speaker, an attorney-at-law, to understand where I think he is mistaken in the role because he is playing the dual role. He is also an attorney-at-law and sits on

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the judiciary and is also a Member of Parliament who sits in the legislative.

But the role of the Member of Parliament is to make and create laws. The role of the judiciary, through the judges, etcetera, is to make judgments for their cases. The lawyer has the role to argue whether or not somebody should get bail, but the point is, Mr. Speaker, in crafting the law, our role is not to say we shouldn't give "a gunman" bail because he might have children or he may have responsibilities that even with just the possession, and not committing a crime, he can be subjected to his family falling into poverty etcetera, etcetera; some of the arguments that were used in a court matter.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, this is not our business. Our business is to set laws that are going to deter crime from being committed. So, I think the Government is clearly on the right track with setting the bar high, and what we are saying is this amnesty is a start. The amnesty is not a means to an end in terms of the fight against illegal guns. It is a start. Certainly, we welcome the recommendation to do the study on it because in a sense while we have had amnesty's before, we are going to treat with this based on data too, not just emotion, not just saying there is a prevalence of crime down in the South or Tow, etcetera, etcetera, but data to ascertain clearly where these crimes are taking place and the source.

The bigger issue, Mr. Speaker, that we have to deal with is not so much the illegal guns on the street, but the illegal guns coming into the country. So, that is why I am saying that this amnesty, I am in full support of it, but it is a start. It is not a means to an end, but the beginning. We simply cannot see the forest or the trees with this. This is not about trying to get the amnesty to be successful, so we could gloat and say we made the best decisions. This is a start to treating with the question of illegal guns on our streets and the danger that they pose to our people. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. George North East. Is it the MP for St. Andrew South East? Honourable MP, please take the floor.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I had no intention

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at all to speak on this subject this morning. I think I have communicated myself very clearly before on this particular Motion that we are discussing. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the last Sitting when this was brought to the House, I actually supported it and I supported it based on the presentation that was made by the Honourable Member for St. David and Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just go back to subsequent presentations that I listened to, and in many cases, the content of the presentations went way beyond the scope of the presentation of the Honourable Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, in some cases, I was a little bit surprised because I felt like what was presented in this House was sufficient to speak to the extent that I spoke on the particular bill that was brought.

But, Mr. Speaker, each time I listen to a presentation on this subject I get even more concerned, I get even more confused and so I would hope, Mr. Speaker, at some point later on in this session that there would be some statement that would be a final statement of the Government of Grenada and its intention as it relates to this.

We've introduced a new issue this morning, never spoken of when this Bill came to the House, and that concept, that issue, even when it was presented, and it was said fine, anybody found with a gun, they would be prosecuted, the law would apply, fine, great. As a matter of fact, I believe that it is absolutely in place.

But, Mr. Speaker, we are introducing, as my colleague said, something new this morning, which is that anyone found with a gun after the amnesty would be denied bail. Mr. Speaker, I am going on what I heard. If we want to request the Hansard of what was said, then let's pause and do that. I am going on what I heard. There were whispers made after, Mr. Speaker, that this House makes laws, that's also true, we make the laws, so we could say no bail or we could say bail and people are getting out of hand, Mr. Speaker.

As a matter of fact, I noted another comment that was made, let us go hard or go home. Mr. Speaker, this is serious, those statements, Mr. Speaker, causes me and I mean the sucking of the teeth I guess means disagreement with what I am saying but, Mr. Speaker, the point is that we are dealing with people here and we can't just rise and

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say anything that comes to our mind because it is unconstitutional at this point what we are proposing, what we are saying. And, Mr. Speaker, we are going ahead to assume that any Bill that comes to this House will be passed just because we have the majority, well, what if somebody on the "Other Side" disagrees? Mr. Speaker, we can't just treat it so trivially.

What was said earlier, Mr. Speaker, gives the impression that everyone found in possession of a gun is a bad man; that's what was said in essence. But, Mr. Speaker, let us consider a good man who gave someone a ride and that good man is then stopped in traffic, and the police search that good man's van and find a gun on the back seat. Mr. Speaker, he now becomes in possession of a weapon. Mr. Speaker... **(Inaudible comment by a Member)** Exactly. So now we go to court... **(Inaudible comment by a Member)** Exactly. And the court now decides that, based on the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, based on the evidence provided, that person should be granted bail... And that is why I am appealing to us, let us not continue on the premise that every person found in possession of a gun is a bad man.

Mr. Speaker, I believe everyone here knows how I feel about the possession of a gun for certain reasons. Let us not assume that every single person who is arrested or found in possession does not have a legitimate case. I am really concerned. I am very concerned about this no-bail issue. Whatever the thought is, whatever the consideration, whatever the plan, I am just saying, the point that was raised earlier, let us not just dismiss it. Let us give consideration as we continue to plan ahead. Mr. Speaker, so that's the first point.

The second point that stood out to me, and there are only two points that I want to raise this morning on this. When we go back to what was said by a Member of this Government about the subject about ballistic testing and when we consider what was said about what the data and the information of the result of ballistic testing will be used to do, Mr. Speaker, I would have wished that the presenter this morning would have clarified it to say well yes it's that, no it's not that but absolutely no mention, no reference was made to ballistic testing this morning. Very interesting.

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As a matter of fact, I noted what was mentioned, biometric analysis, and so, Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear, ballistic testing, biometric analysis or whatever you want to call it, Mr. Speaker, those are two different things. If we need the Hansard, Mr. Speaker, you look a little bit confused... if we need the Hansard to check whether biometric testing was mentioned this morning, I can guarantee you it was not.

So the question is what would be done? Because when we speak about ballistic testing, Mr. Speaker, we are talking about taking a gun, looking at the features of the gun, the features of the bullet, and analysing it. As a matter of fact, you need a specialist, and I am not sure that we have anybody locally, so some countries literally have to send out the weapon to be tested, to be analysed. Mr. Speaker, what exactly is it? What happens, Mr. Speaker, because in ballistic testing, the gun and what you find on the gun, the bullets are used to trace it or to connect it to the crime scene? So, Mr. Speaker, let us once and for all just... I am just appealing for clarity, let's zero it down to that. That all I am appealing for is clarity because I am still a little bit confused as to what exactly what is going to happen after the amnesty. Thank you so much. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. Andrew South East. Honourable Prime Minister, is it your light?

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my apologies. Mr. Speaker, I didn't actually think I had to make any contributions to the support of the Resolution, but I think I will. I will start by saying, Mr. Speaker, what is before the House is what is presented in writing on the Order Paper, but perhaps we don't read so I would read it so that we are clear and the confusion can be cleared up. But being confused is part of the process of learning. It usually means thinking something is one thing and then not being clear then hopefully being clarified.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is an amnesty, once passed by Resolution in this House, would go into effect on May 1, 2024 and will end at 12 a.m. on July 30, 2024. The amnesty is an amnesty that someone has to seek by handing over a firearm or any firearm or any

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ammunition in his or her possession for which he or she does not have a licence. So the laws of Grenada are clear: if you do not have a licence for the firearm or the ammunition, then it is illegal. And as it stands now, whether you hand it in to the police, whether the police meet you with it, if you do not have a licence for it, the police will be required to charge you for illegal possession of a firearm or ammunition. That's the law.

The incentive that my friend spoke of, my learned and distinguished friend as one of our learned and distinguished friends from Carriacou and Petite Martinique is often want to say, the learned and distinguished gentleman knows that the incentive is immunity from prosecution. That's the incentive. Because as it stands now, even with the best of intent, as he himself said, if one of his clients handed him a firearm and ammunition right now and said to him, my dear friend please hand this over to the police for me and he brings it in the police station, the police station could charge him right then and there for being in unlawful or illegal possession of a firearm. So the incentive is purely not being prosecuted, not being charged and not being convicted for illegal possession of a firearm and ammunition.

That is all this Resolution is about, Mr. Speaker. You have 90 days within which, if you have an unlicensed firearm or ammunition, or if you know of someone who has unlicensed firearm and ammunition, to encourage them to bring it in. And as my friend said, you don't want someone who is doing a good deed to be innocently punished. So in addition to permitting any person to hand over an illegal or an unlawful firearm or ammunition.

It also allows for attorneys-at-law, because in variably if they are Criminal Defence Attorneys, they are the ones likely to be treating with criminals or quasi criminals or persons who know criminals and they have a certain level of trust and confidence and so we also make it clear that they can do so through their attorneys-at-law. That is all this Resolution is about.

I shouldn't have to stand here and say that because it is quite clear on the face of the document. So, Mr. Speaker, anything else is grandstanding and, frankly, trying to convert this into a political football... Obscure it. **(Applause)** There is a time and place

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for everything. This is the Resolution that we are debating. So, you may argue someone started something, so yes, I'll jump in line. I'll follow suit, and I will turn around and accuse him of creating confusion or starting it. I mean, come on, Mr. Speaker. So, that is all the Resolution is seeking to do, Mr. Speaker.

We have never said in any way, shape, or form that issuing a firearm amnesty is going to solve the challenge of firearms in our country, or that it is going to be a solution to the issue of firearms. It is one, but a multitude of tools that we have to constantly, relentlessly, pursue. The making of firearms, the manufacturing of firearms, is a process that is continuing, an illegal activity, an unlawful activity. The gun trade and the narcotics trade are things that are continuing, and we have to continuously be vigilant and find various tools to address this. This is just one of many tools; beefing up our surveillance at our ports, from strengthening our coast guards, but more fundamentally, bringing up our children in such a manner that a firearm and trying to be a "bad man" is not glorified and is not an attractive option for them in life. That is the real, one, possible silver bullet that all of us need to pursue.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude because I just want to make it clear. It may very well be that not a single firearm may be surrendered. That's clear. I don't think that I made my presentation on the first occasion that my friend paid attention to the fact that we actually provided some statistics about other countries that have done this.

So I would just read some of it out again; Dominica had a firearm amnesty for one month from the 1st to the 31st of October, 2023. At the end, two firearms were surrendered. The firearm was extended, and at the time we came here, we had not obtained any further empirical data from our colleagues there as to the impact. Jamaica had a firearm amnesty; a total of 100 firearms and 3,000 rounds of ammunition were recovered in the first two weeks. The Prime Minister then was on record saying it surpassed their expectations. Tucks and Cacaos had an amnesty in March 2022, and an incentive of \$500 per illegal firearm was granted; no one surrendered a firearm.

So, Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is that you coming and advocating for paying is just as it would be post 2020, because you don't know. But I think legislation is

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not just about legislation, legislation is a morality to it as well, Mr. Speaker, and by paying or offering cash other than the immunity from prosecution, you may run the risk that people are now actively go and engage in the gun trade because the state now becomes the biggest buyer of firearms.

So we have to understand, Mr. Speaker, we are not suggesting in any way, shape or form that this is a solution; it is a tool. So if it leads to one firearm and one round of ammunition being taken off the street, it is a success. It is one less weapon. And, Mr. Speaker, I also gave the extensive data pertaining to the collection of firearms the last time we were here; the type, the make, we provided all that.

So it is clear that the Royal Grenada Police Force, as is normal, will collect the data on the type, the year, the make, and the model of firearms that it recovers when it mounts operations or when people hand them in. And so this, Mr. Speaker, is just a simple confirmation of that normal process, and that is all we are seeking to do, Mr. Speaker. So I hope the confusion is clarified.

The wider debate about the role of the judiciary and the legislature, we can always leave that for another day, but I would say this, Mr. Speaker. There are four attorneys sitting in this room, and the one thing they can tell you about attorneys is that they can talk from now till their kingdom come, and everybody would have a different perspective of where you begin and where you end. And I end on that note, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Prime Minister. Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the discussions this morning were pretty interesting, but one thing that remains is... **(Inaudible comment by a Member)** I agree. But there is one thing I need to clarify. One thing that remains, Mr. Speaker, is that this is national. This one is about us, the people and our society and ridding it of crime, ridding it of illegal weapons and ammunition, that's what this is about. We are not perfect by any stretch of imagination, but we are committed to this task, and

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we can say that much.

But for the record, Mr. Speaker, I wish to categorically state that, and I say this respectfully, I did not say or speak to biometric testing and if by chance, because we are all human beings subject to error, and it happens to me sometimes. If by chance there was a slip of the tongue that spoke to biometric testing or analysis, that was not intended.

What was intended, Mr. Speaker, is ballistic analysis. That is what was intended to say, just in case there was a slip of the tongue to the contrary. And I do not know much about the biometric side of testing either, so I find it strange that someone of such limited knowledge in this field will make such a profound statement in this Honourable House.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank “Both Sides” of the House for your stirring contribution to this Motion. Thank you very much, and I now commit this Motion to the House for its vote. Thanks. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Leader of Government’s Business.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion approved.

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 15 – Bills.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government’s Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the second reading of a Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Electronic Communications Bill, 2024.

Question put.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government’s Business.

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Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill bears tremendous significance for the prosperity of Grenada and for our transition into a digital and prosperous society. The Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTA), Mr. Speaker, is in fact the regulatory authority for telecommunications to serve the member states with a commission established in each of the contracting states, that is, and speaking of the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NTRC). Just to provide a little context, Mr. Speaker, in respect of this particular Bill, in the year 2000 Grenada enacted the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority Act Chapter 85C and the Telecommunications Act Chapter 315C which were harmonised legislations enacted by each contracting state of the ECTA treaty to incorporate and implement the objectives of the treaty.

Mr. Speaker, this is 24 years after, almost a quarter century, and one would appreciate that there has been a significant shift in the way we do things in the digital environment, in telecommunications and in radio. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that this particular legislation be enacted to match the challenges that confront us as we transition into a digital economy.

Note, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is called the Electronic Communications Bill and not “telecommunications”. Electronic Communications Bill. The structure of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, provides for 157 clauses, a huge Bill divided into 14 Parts and three Schedules. So, Mr. Speaker, it is a very detailed Bill and, of course, calls for a lot of research to see what is going on around us, in the region, here at home and so on.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we will attempt within the limited time allowed us today to present this Bill in a way that the general public would appreciate what is happening.

Part I of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, deals with preliminary matters like definitions and so on and in particular points to some new definitions...

Mr. Speaker: Hold Honourable Member while the Honourable Deputy holds the Chair for a while.

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Sergeant-at-Arms: Madam Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen): Leader of Government's Business, you may proceed.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you so much, Madam Deputy Speaker. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will take off from where I left off to say that Part I deals with the preliminary and particular, sets out some new definitions and expands current definitions that are consistent with what is happening around us in the digital and communication space.

So we have new definitions like "electronic communications", "net neutrality", and these are critical definitions and as we go along, Madam Deputy Speaker, we would appreciate the context of this and in particular the expansion, Madam Deputy Speaker, of universal service to universal service and access; the importance of "access" in that expanded definition.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, Part II speaks to the powers and the duties of the Minister. And you would appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's a huge piece, and so we have to try and condense as much as we possibly can. Part II provides for the powers and duties of the Minister. Clause 6 in particular provides for the Minister on the recommendation of ECTEL, which is the regional body to exempt any person or category of person, or ship, or aircraft any type of electronic communication network or electronic communication service or a diplomatic mission from the Bill or a part or provision of this Bill including an exemption from payment of fees. These, Madam Deputy Speaker, are exempted.

However, by virtue of clause 7, Madam Deputy Speaker, after consultation with ECTEL, the Minister shall set policy on electronic communication. That particular insertion is critical because we are living in a dynamic environment, and electronic communication is ever evolving, it is important that the Minister be given such powers. And, of course, for the avoidance of doubt, the powers of the Minister, Madam Deputy

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Speaker, are really covered by the exercise of that power by way of Cabinet decisions and Cabinet conclusions.

In other words, when ECTEL make these proposals to the Minister for change, those proposals, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be submitted to Cabinet and Cabinet as a body takes a decision, and then the Minister execute. So I just wanted to say this for clarity because when we look at the extent of this particular legislation and the reach of the Minister, it might seem overbearing for one individual, but for the general public, they ought to understand how this actually works in actual fact.

The Minister may give in writing on matters of policy in relation to electronic communication to the Commission, and the Commission shall comply with those directives.

Part III, so I'm getting there. Part III, Madam Deputy Speaker, National Telecommunications speaks to the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission. So it speaks to the Commission. What is it? How does it function? As...

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): Leader of Government's Business, please give way for a few minutes so that we can affect the exchange. I hand over to the Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Deputy Speaker. Honourable Leader of Government's Business, please proceed.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I hope that is not a strategy to distract me from this morning's proceedings...

Mr. Speaker: I'm sorry.

Hon. Philip Telesford: And I also hope that I will get back my time lost. **(Laughter)** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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So, Mr. Speaker, in respect of Part III that speaks to the NTRC, the Commission, under this Part, the NTRC is now going to be a body corporate. This means, Mr. Speaker, that the NTRC is a separate person and can now sue and be sued in its own name, which is different to what exists at this moment. It can also own property in its own name, and so this, Mr. Speaker, also gives a better account to the Commission to be able to exercise its function and expand its services.

The NTRC has certain powers, but, in this current context, Mr. Speaker, it is still restricted because it was not a body corporate prior. It was a statutory body. Now it has, Mr. Speaker, separated the investigatory arm of the regulation from the judiciary arm, and there is now, Mr. Speaker, a separate tribunal which is captured in Part XIII, you would see that as we go along. So it is creating, Mr. Speaker, a stronger, more robust organisation being able, as it were, to take more decisive decisions, and we will see that as we go along, Mr. Speaker.

Part IV of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, speaks to the licensing authorisation of electronic communications. This Part sets out a clear and detailed procedure for the application, for the review and the granting of licences and removes this process from the regulation, incorporating it into the draft Bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a set process that is to be followed, set time frames within which the Commission must now respond on an application, and if a licence isn't granted, for example, Mr. Speaker, how can the applicant respond and how should they respond? All of this, Mr. Speaker, is captured in a very transparent and equitable manner so that no one feels disenfranchised by this Bill.

Part V speaks, and very importantly also, to the change of control and ownership of licenses and frequency authorisations. Very significant, Mr. Speaker. This section sets out new provisions. The new provisions are captured here and seek to, again, ensure, by and large, that there is no unfair competition amongst licensees or people owning a licence. So it deals with the change of control and ownership of licenses and frequency authorisation. One second, please.

This Part of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, requires notification of a change of significant

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interest. Significant interest is defined as “20% shareholding”. So any of this, Mr. Speaker, requires notification to the Commission, must be notified. And it empowers the regulator to address important matters like mergers and acquisitions and changes in shareholding in a more efficient manner.

You'd know, just a few years ago, Mr. Speaker, there was a merger happening in Grenada in respect of... it was Cable Vision with Flow? I think it was... Right. So we had these... I think I am going right... **(Inaudible comment by Members)** Columbus Communications. So I think there were three companies altogether that were merged into one.

It empowers the regulator to address these significant changes in ownership because when there are mergers and acquisitions of that magnitude, Mr. Speaker, it results in dominance of the market space and where there is dominance, they can also result in unfair trade practices and international casing points, are those like Microsoft and Facebook, we see what has happened in that space. We, Mr. Speaker, as a developing small island state, going up and up and up, must ensure that the proper platform is in place for take-off. That is why these... And let me state that this was not started under the NDC Administration. We are continuing the work. So some of these debates would not have to be obtained this morning, we are giving credit where credit is due. But it's a very important piece of legislation.

Section 66 of Part V, Mr. Speaker, 66(1) says, “A licence and frequency authorisation is personal to that licensee”, you cannot transfer it, and you cannot just sell it off or lend it off, and a frequency authorisation holder and shall not be so transferred, sorry, I'm repeating myself. So it is a personal license, and when we say personal, personal in the context of an individual as well as an entity person.

67(1) “A licensee or frequency authorisation holder shall not cause, permit or acquiesce in any change of control of the licence or frequency authorisation, unless the licensee or frequency authorisation holder submits a written application for written approval to ECTEL and the Commission at least 90 days prior to such change of control”. Underscoring the importance of ensuring that control isn't slipping through some crack,

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some loophole, there is also the duty to notify and to get approval for these transfers.

Part VI, Mr. Speaker, Rights and Obligations of Licensee and Frequency Authorisation Holders. What are those rights and obligations? This Part relates to the rights and obligations of the licensee and frequency authorisation holders. It includes very important provisions which provide the NTRC with new tools necessary to address the emergence of vertically integrated service providers. Vertically integrated service providers.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there are those who provide the submarine cables, underwater cables. There are those who control domain names. There are those who control internet platforms and networks, and there are those who are service providers. All operating... and also there are those who control antennas and spectrums, FM and AM bands and all of these things. Mr. Speaker, what are we trying to achieve?

It is necessary that these services are not... or these areas within that space aren't controlled solely by a single dominant player. When there is singularity and dominance in that space, it creates unfair competition or no competition at all. So there are certain rights and obligations. 69 (1), "Subject to subsection (8), a licensee who operates a public electronic communication network shall provide—

- (a) interconnection on his or her electronic communication network to another licensee. They have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that that particular network is shared. The interconnection must happen.
- (b) Mr. Speaker, that licensee shall provide access, sorry, to another licensee to infrastructure that is owned, operated by, occupied by or controlled by the licensee, shall provide access, if it is technically feasible to enable that other licensee to install a facility for use in connection with the supply of an electronic communication; or
- (c) both interconnection under paragraph (a) and access under paragraph (b), stated earlier".

So, Mr. Speaker, access and interconnectivity this, Mr. Speaker, ensure new entrance, new investors, and aspiring Grenadians wanting to invest in that space now

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have the opportunity to so do. They are not blocked out or locked out of that environment. So it's creating room for expansion. And, Mr. Speaker, soon we might see companies like Digicel offering cable service, and cable TV if they haven't started yet because it's providing, Mr. Speaker, the platform for these things to happen.

Mr. Speaker, subject to section (8), a licensee who owns or operates a submarine cable landing station, that's those cables under the sea or the seabed, they are required to provide access to its submarine cable landing station or co-location, including virtual co-location, in the prescribed manner as prescribed by the legislation. So they are now required to share, access granted, access to international submarine cable capacity. They are required to provide access. It's also required to provide access to other licensees, and access to infrastructure that it owns, operates, occupies or controls.

A licensee in Section 4, Mr. Speaker, who fails to comply with subsection (1) and (2), in respect of sharing and access, commits an offence and is liable on indictment to a fine of three percent of annual gross revenues, that's before taxes and expenses of the licensee for the previous year. So there's no excuse in saying, well, when the year finishes, I have to make a calculation. It is in respect of the previous year, 3% of your gross revenues.

If one provider has access, just imagine this, to the outside world, by way of these cables, and other providers do not have such access then they have to approach the one with access and see if they're going to grant access and you know what happens, one can literally choke new entrance out of this system. I'll just skip some of these things.

Part VII, Mr. Speaker, deals with Registration and Approval. This Part addresses the country code level and domain type approval. Country code top-level domain name registration, the .com, the .gd and so on and so on. Section 87 subsection (1), the Commission shall establish and manage a national plan for country code top-level domain name registration, in accordance with the regional plan established by ECTEL. And (2) speaks to the Commission shall register and manage country code top-level domain names in Grenada. We also delegate that responsibility to an independent source, as the case may be. Yes.

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Section or Part VII speaks to Competition, and I believe I spoke to Competition in my discourse, so I'll just... Some of the things I spoke about earlier regarding deals with Competition, so I'll skip that in the interest of time.

I want to just deal with this new section here briefly. Part IX speaks to the Universal Service and Access Fund, and we spoke to that when we were talking about the Preliminaries early in Part I, which spoke to the service versus access. So there is a fund, a universal service and access fund that is set up. The Bill addresses universal service and access under this Part and extends the definition of universal service to include universal service and access, and allows the fund to be used to provide access devices and other ancillary services in support of universal service.

In other words, the fund now allows you not just to be able to provide service or access points, but it can actually provide assets, tablets, right, I'm just using tablets as one, but communication devices that are necessary for the uptake of communications in those areas. And, Mr. Speaker, you'd appreciate that there are some areas that are economically depressed and the investor may not see certain areas as economically viable so the Commission now is empowered under this fund where access is now part of the conditions for utilisation of the fund can now provide that kind of service to that particular area. Right?

So this fund can be used for ICT development in rural areas and other areas that are not fully developed, because it is not profitable for the provider to do so. The fund will be used by the NTRC in consultation with the Government to ensure that areas that are economically depressed will not be left out. All right. So that's it for that.

Offences. Part X. The Bill addresses other offences under this part these offences were present in the Telecommunications Act, but did not have penalties attached and when we look at those offences we'll see how many penalties are there and the extent of the penalties, especially when it comes to non-compliance with the sharing of submarine cables and so on and so on and so on. Investigation. It allows for investigation in Part... I mentioned it earlier.

Part XII, Dispute Resolution, just allow me to share this quickly. This part... and

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this really treats with the consumer on one hand and the licensee being aggrieved on the other. So it says, "This part empowers the NTRC to intervene in disputes which remain unresolved..." **(Sound of Time Bell)** Mr. Speaker, I beg for five minutes, please.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable MP, I'm giving half of this.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Three minutes.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you. And the one, which is four?

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Honourable MP.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you. All right. Dispute Resolution. This Part empowers, Mr. Speaker, the NTLC to intervene in disputes which remain unresolved between retail customers and the providers after 30 days. Prior to this, or what is obtained now, this is how disputes are resolved. They call between 6:30 a.m. and 7 o'clock in the morning to resolve the disputes, and they go on Facebook to resolve their disputes, but we're saying now, Mr. Speaker, they can approach, and this is what has to be obtained and you can do that online because the platform is there, approach the NTRC directly.

Mr. Speaker, also, all of those contracts for all of those service packages that are issued by the service providers must first be approved by the NTRC, all of those. No more bundling of services, and all of that is captured in the legislation, in the Bill.

So the licensee cannot force you to take something that you don't want. So if you go to the market and you're selling fish and you have cabbages, in order to get the fish, if you want snapper, we're not selling snapper unless you buy a cabbage. Right? This is not happening under this legislation, no bundling, all right. So it is separate and really creates a measure of fairness and accountability.

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I think I'm taking some time. But, for the consumer, they are protected, for the operators and sorry, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that within 30 days, if that is not resolved, then the NTRC steps in and hears the matter and treats with it. So there is... and they can also refer to various arms of Government, including Consumer Affairs, and so on and so on. In respect of the aggrieved operators, within 60 days, the same thing applies, but you must follow those procedures.

The tribunal is there, Mr. Speaker, I'm just trying to manoeuvre time now, and I respect you highly. This Part establishes the tribunal. This is a new provision under the Bill and serves to separate the regulatory function from the adjudicative function. This creates greater transparency as the Commission no longer investigates and adjudicates. And the Commissioner is appointed by I think it's Chief Justice and two others... And the Commissioner must fit certain criteria, they must be published and all of that, and must be approved, and they can also be removed by the Chief Justice.

And then we have some important things here. Part XIV speaks to miscellaneous items, but they are very important things. I just want to touch on one definition quickly, "net neutrality", right? In terms of one of the new terms, because I didn't really go through that. Net neutrality, Mr. Speaker, means "the principle that an electronic communications network and licensees permit all data over the internet by not discriminating, interrupting, throttling, blocking or degrading such data. Service providers must treat all economic communication or data equally without discrimination.

And so this Bill, Mr. Speaker, I'm finished, is just creating the right environment for customer protection, transparency, sharing of technology, sharing of information, creating competition in the environment and basically as a stop-gap towards further mergers and control of the space. Mergers can happen, we're not saying no, but what we are saying is that they must follow certain protocols, and they must be first approved, and they cannot create an environment where there is no competition. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Much obliged. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Thank you very much, Honourable Leader of

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Government's Business. Honourable MP for St. Andrew South East.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a couple of comments and to contribute to the Bill that is before us and to say that we on "This Side" are quite cognisant that this Bill presented here is really a product of the transformation of the telecommunications sector that has taken place over the years.

And I think it's so important to take a historical context as well to all that was said and to say, as was pointed out, that this process started quite many years ago, when we would have suffered so much, particularly in this region, as it relates to the monopoly that existed in the sector.

Mr. Speaker, if we go back to that period when we think of the profits made, compare this region with other regions in some cases over 300% more, right, than what the per customer profit was in other regions. Now in addition to that, in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, when there was the conversation about breaking the monopoly of some countries in the region Dominica and others, St. Kitts and so you would know that in some cases more than EC\$400 million was what was being tabled, proposed, for breaking them up so, this was not going to be any cheap process. Right.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I want to highlight is when we think back, many of us may have even forgotten some of those things, but the rates that were charged in those days, exorbitant rates, right, whether it's for local or overseas calls. We would remember the days, Mr. Speaker, when we paid two dollars and more for overseas calls. Mr. Speaker, we had no choice of a service provider, no choice.

And so, Mr. Speaker, as I think of this, what it was, I really must give credit I can't say anything further without giving credit to our former Minister for Telecommunication, Honourable Gregory Bowen (**applause**) for the work that was done, Mr. Speaker, himself and other ministers within the region in this particular transformative agenda.

So, Mr. Speaker, because of that, we enjoy today's serious diversification in the economy. When you look at the service sector, it is what it is today to a large extent because of a lot of the changes that took place during that period, the expansion of the

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sector in itself. So when we think about even things like technology, the visa technology, for example, that was so necessary for the setting up of call centres, expansion of call centres and that is why I was so happy yesterday to see the opening of the new branch KM2 Solutions, Mr. Speaker, a lot of this work would have facilitated the setting up and expansion and the progress that would have happened over the years where hundreds and thousands of people were able to find jobs, thousands of young Grenadians, as a result of those revolutionary moves that took place back then.

So, Mr. Speaker, on the surface, I believe this Bill is quite a noble one. It's very similar to the Telecommunication Act that is being repealed, right, very, very similar, a few changes here and there. Mr. Speaker, I believe the two things that I really value the Bill for, is its effort to stifle competition, right, its efforts sorry, not to stifle competition because we moving away from a culture of monopoly and we're opening this thing up and what this Bill is doing is to continue to maintain that situation, so give persons continued ability to compete, to open up the space, and open up the market.

But very important, Mr. Speaker, is that this Bill ensures that the loopholes as they relate to the regulation of the sector are tightened and covered. Right. So we all would admit that, over the years, a number of loopholes were identified in the previous legislation as it relates to the regulation of the sector, and that I believe also is being addressed here.

But as we attempt to tighten up, Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns that I have, looking at the Bill in itself, we would realise that there were some additions, a couple of new definitions, Mr. Speaker, and here lie my concerns as it relates to this.

Mr. Speaker, what we are asking here is that we want to look specifically at clause 31. Right? If you look at the title of that clause, it says, "Prohibition on operating a network or providing service without a licence or frequency authorisation". Mr. Speaker, when you look at this, in essence, what it's quoting there is that you need to have a licence to operate an electronic communication network or provide an electronic communication service. And if we go back to the principal Act, you would realise, Mr. Speaker, that there was no mention of those two terms in the previous document that we would have looked at.

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Mr. Speaker, that being said, we want to ensure now that the broadening of the definitions, because what we're doing in essence here is broadening the definition, broadening that umbrella for regularisation... for regulating, and so, in doing that, Mr. Speaker, it brings us to the actual definitions. When we speak of electronic communications service, because you must have a licence to provide the service, right means a service that is provided according to the Bill wholly or partially by the conveyance of signals on an electronic communication network.

But, Mr. Speaker, when you go to look at the definition within the Bill of even electronic communication network, you would find terms like "transmission system", which could include technologies, equipment and all of that. It goes on to define a number of other areas, "high voltage lines" and all of those things. Right? Mr. Speaker, within that, the broadness of the definition, words, and terms like "transmission systems" and other resources, Mr. Speaker, the question is, is it absolutely clear who falls now under this umbrella? And so we are wondering, Mr. Speaker, because this is new to the Bill, are we extending now beyond the Flow, are we extending now beyond the Digicel, are we extending now beyond, for example, radio stations, television stations? Mr. Speaker, the introduction of those two definitions quite obviously would need further clarification. And that is where I feel more consultation...

So, people in the sector, for example, I can tell you, a number of them have been calling to determine how far this stretches, who is actually captured and not captured within there? Now if you look at the exemptions, if you look at the areas that speak to where licence is not required you're speaking mainly to emergency sectors, for example, police, I would imagine if there's a hurricane and NaDMA and all of those would, obviously, the health sector and all of that would be captured there. The question is, what further room is there for other persons involved, especially noting, Mr. Speaker, how quickly this industry, this space, this sector is evolving, and there is a genuine concern as to how far and broad this definition captures and how far and broad it actually captures.

Mr. Speaker, I would imagine that anyone would be consumed because if you look at the clause, specifically going back to 31, it says, "A person who contravenes subsection

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(1) or (2) commits an offence and is liable on conviction on indictment to a fine of one million dollars or to imprisonment for a term of 10 years or to both". So it means that people who operate within this space obviously would want to be certain that this does not apply to them.

And that is why the broadening of the term creates some concerns on the part of persons within the sector. Because in their mind, Mr. Speaker, the introduction of the internet and all of those technological developments that we see happening opens up opportunities for people and so it means that whatever laws that we are passing, it means that people must be for sure, must be aware of how those would affect their operation.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I still believe it is very important to hold broader consultations with persons who are likely to be or who might be, concerned that they could be affected by the broadening of the definitions.

Mr. Speaker, one might say, okay, well, this is not so important because one can just apply for a license. And while this might be so, Mr. Speaker, we also know that there are conditions under which those said licences could be denied. And we are aware of the process, Mr. Speaker, quite a pretty long process, that during that period that you might be waiting or awaiting a review of your request, Mr. Speaker, the question is, how is that going to affect a person in terms of their time, in terms of their resources because it can end up in court as well.

So we fully understand, Mr. Speaker, and I 100% support regulating the big boys in the sector, the big companies within the sector, because we understand the importance of preserving the achievements that we've made in liberalising the sector. But again, I say, Mr. Speaker, we want to be sure as we do that person who broadcast, for example, people who seek to educate, so we have people who do online news for example, we want to make sure that broadening of the definition in no way would affect those persons and if they are affected, Mr. Speaker, that we would have related to them sufficient information as to what is required and how, Mr. Speaker, their rights would not be infringed upon.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is extremely important that we not only speak to the large

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companies because this is what was referred to earlier in the presentation, which, as I said before, we totally absolutely... The genesis of this, Mr. Speaker, the genesis of this Bill obviously we would have been acquainted with it and supported it, but we are speaking this morning as to the additions that were made the changes that were made particularly when you speak about telecommunication and the broadness of those definitions, Mr. Speaker, we do have some concerns.

And so that being said, Mr. Speaker, I want to strongly suggest that in wrapping up this presentation, the presenter would provide some additional information as it relates to those smaller persons within the ambit or possibly within the ambit of this piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew South East. Please turn your light off. Honourable MP for St. George North East.

Hon. Ron Redhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be somewhat brief. I rise first and foremost to support the Electronic Communications Bill 2024.

Now, as mentioned earlier by the Leader of Government's Business, this Bill aims essentially to overhaul telecommunications law within the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL) Contracting States. It involves repealing and replacing the Telecommunications Act, Chapter 315C, with a more comprehensive legislative framework that includes electronic communication in general, and electronic communications in general.

The Bill's objective is to facilitate, liberalised, non-discriminatory access to the electronic communication sector. As mentioned earlier by the Leader of Government's Business the whole question of the monopoly, the whole question of the framework that is required to be able to foster that. So it's expected to foster a competitive landscape characterised by fairness, transparency and accountability from the regulators. This is key.

Mr. Speaker, it is noteworthy that Grenada only recently exceeded to the

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convention on cybercrime on the 22nd of April, and as such this replacement of the law could not be timelier for people and the country and it speaks to the Government whole commitment to transforming our digital space, first, by way of legislation and treaties. And as mentioned by one of the contributors before me, this law or Bill, rather, is a part of a suite of bills that are not mandated, but are expected to be passed if the OECS is to come in line with modern legislative framework and treaties. So I want to spend some time, Mr. Speaker, talking about Part III of the Bill, which deals with the Commission itself and incidental matters, specifically clauses 10 to 12 and 22 to 25.

Clause 10, Mr. Speaker, deals with the functions of the Commission. Subsection (1) to (3) outlines the established functions of the Commission, and one important draw out or pick for me is the important function to advise the Minister on shaping policies around the sector.

So, as mentioned again by the Leader of Government's Business, where you may see the "Minister shall", it does not speak specifically to the individual, him or her making a determination, but the Minister shall, by virtue of this legislation, be in consultation with the Commission. And the Minister as mentioned by the Leader of Government's Business who already has his obligation or her obligation to treat with the Cabinet is not again doing this on an individual basis.

So this is critical because it means, therefore, that the Commission is going to be able to provide through dialogue or engagement with the Minister the necessary input for shaping policies. So it is not going to be an individualised approach in treating this matter, given its wide scope and look, and the need to modernise.

Mr. Speaker, just quickly, clause 9, which helps to speak to that, is the question of the composition of the very Commission, which is very broad and draws from a very wide pool. So again, coming back to the question of advice to the Minister, the Commission is going to be able to provide a substantial amount of advice to the Line Minister because it draws from a very wide pool, taking into consideration the nature of this sector.

Clause 12, Mr. Speaker, treats with the powers of the Commission. I want to zero in on subsection (2) (e) of the clause, which, with your leave, I would like the permission

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to read. It says, "Issue directions in writing to a licensee or frequency authorisation holder to direct the licensee or frequency authorisation holder to take such measures or cease such activities as may be necessary for the purpose of ensuring compliance with this Act".

In other words, Mr. Speaker, we no longer have a toothless tiger parading about by way of a Commission, but we now have a system clearly outlined in this law, a Bill rather, being put forward as to what is expected, how, and as mentioned by the Leader of Government's Business you have the question that was included now of the critical penalties. Because too often, Mr. Speaker, statutory boards, commissions, etcetera, are formed and they can't do anything. We have such examples right now, I wouldn't call any names, but just to say that you have these bodies which are brought into force by law, but they really cannot do anything. So it is a means to help strengthen the institutions in a more meaningful way, especially as it relates to the sector that we are referring to.

Mr. Speaker, clause 22 deals and treats with the advisory committee, particularly an *ad hoc* advisory committee. Again, this is going to help with the specialisation of the Commission. By that, we mean there might be an issue that requires the advice of the Minister or Government, so to speak, that is not captured in the membership of the Commission. But if the Commission has the power to use now these *ad hoc* advisory committees much like what was done or rather proposed in the operationalisation of the museum last year with the board where you have members who make up the board but you are then able to tap into some more specialised advice outside of the board.

Again, this is important because, given the nature of this, we would not know all. As discussed earlier in one of the Motions, our role is to pass the legislation. And, therefore, at times at this moment in passing the legislation there might be some elements that we may miss so later on down the road in the functions of this Commission what we are going to see is that they would be able to get a wider or draw rather from a wider pool of advice to be able to influence policy as it relates to that.

Mr. Speaker, clause 23 quickly speaks to the secrecy and confidentiality of the legislation. Now it's important for the public to note or understand that this is not to suppress information. Right? Every time we hear secrecy and confidentiality we miss

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the point. It is about being professional. And so, as much as we can, you may attempt to reduce interference from outside for the functions and duties of the members of the commission. So this is what this is expected to do. Now, in a case where maybe a member of the Commission is acting biased and is not performing their duties in accordance with the Act and with the Bill, rather, there is a mechanism where that member, if found acting improperly, will be treated with. So the secrecy and confidentiality are not to suppress as mentioned, but it is to allow for the professional functioning of the commission, given the sensitive nature of times that may arise as a result of that.

Again it speaks to where we need to go because when talking about electronic crimes, cyber security that sort of thing, leakages are something that can in a sense cause problems for a country, cause problems for an individual etcetera and, therefore, the law must be able to properly and professionally guide and make combinations for that.

So in a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, I would say that I fully support this Bill before us and I believe that we definitely need further advances in the legislative framework for electronic devices, managing that, ensuring that as we progress globally, Grenada is not going to be left behind in this sector. So with these few words, I express my full support for this Bill. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. George North East. And I now invite the MP for St. Andrew South West to take the floor.

Hon. Lennox Andrew: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is after 12. Good afternoon to everybody. **(Inaudible comment by Members) (Laughter)** It is almost 12. So, Mr. Speaker, I stand to give support to the Bill, the extremely important Bill for our country's economic development. The fact that we are moving into a new digital age, we are moving to digitising our economy, and that electronic means of communication is now becoming the most efficient and most effective means of communicating in the world today.

In giving my support, Mr. Speaker, I would, first of all, would like to recognise the

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work played or done by the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunication Authority in preparing this draft Bill for promulgation in all of the contracting member states which are the Windward Islands plus St. Kitts and Nevis and of the extensive communication that took place with all stakeholders so that everybody got an opportunity to contribute to that Bill so that you know, the final draft is something that would reflect the reality on the ground as no one has in fact been left out including the public they had their part to play.

So over a very long period starting somewhere in 2012 ECTEL had a series of communication taking place so that, in other words, extensive consultation, that took place before that Bill was, that draft Bill was completed and presented for promulgation by all of the contracting states sometime in 2019. So I want to recognise the work of ECTEL in that regard.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, maybe one can go back to basic economics theory to understand what this Bill is really trying to do. And in... well those of us who have been through Economics or did a course ECON 201, will learn about market structure and you speak about a competitive market or a perfect market, a market that is a monopoly, a monopolistic market, where you have monopolistic competition, where you have oligopoly and duopoly and so on.

And really and truly what this Bill is trying to do given the changes, the development that would have taken place in the telecommunication industry since ECTEL was formed in 2000, 2001 is that, this Bill now seeks to ensure that what you now has to operate in the contracting member states can be described very much as a more or less perfect competition so that the telecommunication market borders something of what is referred to as a "perfect market", in which you have many suppliers, many producers none is sufficiently large to influence price, non is sufficiently large to have significant market share and to have significant market power so as to influence price, to influence supply and to dominate the market. Good.

Because there have been substantial changes, I wouldn't say changes, substantial development within the industry over the last 24 years. And the present Telecommunication Bill does not allow and does not give regulators the tools that they

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require to manage and regulate those new developments. What this new Bill is doing is that it is trying to ensure that the regulators of telecommunication in the Member States have the tools, have the tools that they can use to ensure that there is no market failure and to ensure that there is competition, there is competition and that as far as possible, monopoly doesn't exist.

Because where you have monopolies, you have all kinds of problems. With monopolies, you have barriers, no competition, and barriers to entry. Where you have monopolies, you have inefficiency and poor quality service. Where you have monopolies, you have high prices for these services. So the thinking is that if we can regulate the industry and have control of the industry and prevent monopoly formation or near monopoly formation, then the consumer as a whole will benefit as we move towards establishing a telecommunication industry within our region.

And, therefore, Mr. Speaker, this new Bill has a number of elements that introduce some new elements that the Telecommunication Bill does not have. And, of course, the Leader of Government's Business made reference to these seven or eight new elements that this new Bill would have.

So they make reference, for example, to net mutuality, which allows for the continuation of an open internet. The competition provisions will allow for monopoly formation to be reduced as much as possible. The communication tribunal, which would allow for the setting up of disputes between the service providers and, of course, the consumers, and also impose penalties for those who didn't comply. Very importantly, the setting up of the NTRC as a corporate body, a legal corporate body that gives it a legal existence and gives it power. All of this, Mr. Speaker, would be read down to the quality of the service that the providers make available to our customers.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to just zero in on two of the major developments or maybe one, which has two parts, that would have taken place in the last years that warrant that this new Bill be put into effect. So, Mr. Speaker, in the last five years, we have seen a number of mergers and acquisitions. In other words, the market has become, what economists would say, "It has become consolidated". We had parent companies like

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Cable and Wireless and Columbus Communications merging to form one, and in that regard, becoming something of a near monopoly. As I said before, when you have a monopoly, you have monopolistic power, and monopolistic power brings with it some negatives.

So, it means, therefore, that in Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent the island-wide fixed network infrastructure is now being owned and operated by one operator, one operator, as I said before that in itself is a monopoly, so that fixed-voice, broadband and video services are now being controlled under one operator. Now, the present Telecommunication Act doesn't have provisions for dealing with a near-monopoly situation in the islands. Good. And what this new Bill therefore does is that it will set anti-competitive, well, it will set regulations and provisions to ensure that competition exists within the sector. It will also set obligations and it will impose obligations on those monopolies, if there are any, so that these monopolies that have significant market power, their activities and their behaviours can be controlled.

Another major development, Mr. Speaker, with the formation of these mergers and acquisitions, is that some of these companies have now become vertically integrated. And vertically integrated simply means that they control every step in the value chain. So they control it, and if they control it. And if they control it, it means, therefore, that they have significant monopoly power. And in our case, the submarine cable systems and the terrestrial, which is the fixed line, mobile infrastructure system, are in fact now under the control of a single provider, so they have significant power.

And (b) in that situation, it means therefore, it's difficult, in other words, it's difficult for new entrants to enter the industry. In a perfect market, one of the characteristics of a perfect market is that there must be no barriers to entry. Who wants to enter, enter, who wants to leave, they go. But when you have significant monopolies being formed in a market, that monopoly control prevents new entrants from entering the industry. And when you have monopoly power, as I said before, you have all kinds of negative economic issues coming with it. Good?

So, access to subsea and land-based infrastructure is important if you're going to

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have a competitive electronic communication market operating within our islands. And therefore, what this new Bill seeks to do is to exercise control over the formation of these new near-monopolies. Good? So that they're going to be easy access, or easier access to enter the market and to remove barriers so that new persons can come into the market. And that's what this new Bill is also trying to, is therefore trying to do.

It will provide provisions which would allow National Telecommunications in the NTRCs, to determine when and how a particular operator is vertically integrated and to allow for access to that infrastructure which is owned by them, thereby eliminating the barriers to entry, and of course enabling competition among, within the sector, within the sector itself.

Mr. Speaker, an important aspect of this new Bill that the present Telecommunication Bill does not address relates to consumer and consumer protection. How are consumers protected in this new structure, especially when you have a monopoly formation? And in that regard, the quality of the service that consumers get is extremely important. This new Bill is going to provide a new consumer protection regulation, which will give power to the NTRC to regulate the terms and conditions under which services are provided to the public, to ensure that things are fair. And very importantly, to ensure that quality service is available to the customers and to the users of the telecommunication industry. Of course, Mr. Speaker, there are many other issues that this new Bill introduces.

The issue of the tribunal, Mr. Speaker, is extremely important, and I think our Leader of Government's Business made reference to that. The fact that at present our NTRC carries out the dual role of being a regulator and adjudicator. Yes? With this new Bill, with the formation of the tribunal, the NTRC functions as the regulator. But it cannot be simultaneously a regulator and an adjudicator.

So the adjudicating part is now being done by this tribunal, and that will ensure that there is no objectivity, fairness, clarity, you know and impartiality when it comes to decision making relative to disputes that customers have with the service providers. So all in all, Mr. Speaker, I think it is an extremely important Bill for us in Grenada and for us

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in the OECS.

My understanding is that the Bill has already been enacted in some of the islands in the OECS, and it is now our turn to have this Bill enacted, as we move towards the harmonisation of the electronic communication industry within our region. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable MP for St. Andrew South West. And I invite the Honourable MP for St. Mark to make her contribution.

Hon. Dr. Clairce Modeste–Curwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the Electronic Communications Bill as presented by the Member for St. George... How do you call there? South East. **(Laughter)** Mr. Speaker, this Bill is very necessary, very timely. As we progress with the issue of communications, over time, we'll see even more coming because the world of communication is moving at a fast pace. And so, we welcome these changes. And ... Sister Emmalin Pierre had spoken about some of the genesis, so I wouldn't go there but just to remind that it is a work in progress started by some very energetic persons, under the direction of the New National Party Government, and we recognise the importance of what is being done here. And so, we support the principle of the Bill in general.

I just have some issues that I would like to raise, Mr. Speaker. In terms of electronic communications, I'm taking the point from the definitions now, as I've looked at it. The definitions are so broad that I think at some point in time, there needs to be some clarification. So I see under electronic communications there is voice, there's data, there's text, there is audio, video, sound, a number of things, and some of these activities are things that we do on a daily basis, we text, we send voice messages and so on. Are these subject to that kind of regulation? These are things that we must know.

Yesterday I was at a funeral, I didn't even notice a camera there **(laughter)**, but a friend of mine who lives overseas sent me a message, a text, whatever, saying "I'm watching you now at the funeral". Now, and this is growing. This has become

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commonplace, especially as we have so many persons in the diaspora whose relatives or friends may have passed, or maybe it's not such a sad event. It might be something joyous, whatever, but any event but these things are broadcast nationally, regionally and abroad, would these be subject to those sorts of things?

Are they going to be fees now? I don't know the license, if the persons are licensed to do that? If they are, what are their fees? And these are some of the things that I have not seen. Although the Commission... It mentions that the Commission is responsible for setting fees, but what kind of fees? Are there parameters, and I guess that will come later, but these are some of the things that people would need to know. Also, in terms of equipment, cellular phones, mobile phones.

And so, are we subject to in part, some of the regulations or all of the regulations, all of that? I don't know. But it is a very heavy document, very broad and speaks to things that we as regular persons who are not that *au fait* with the electronic communications, or the media, take for granted. Are there going to be changes in those areas, and how and when will they be implemented? Mr. Speaker, given the broadness of the definitions, is there any room for uncertainty? Is there any room for some kind of mischief, where some persons, some users, could be unduly called to give some explanation as to their operations, and so on?

I find it's kind of overbroad and possibly open to abuse. And so I'm talking about the small man, who's doing something small, or the individual. We need, at some point, to have some clarity on that. And in terms of the applications for the licenses, again, there's some vagueness there, and reasonableness is not established, as to what it is, about what is reasonable. So, is there again room for persons to be... For example, it mentions that the Commission may ask for more time to get more, or may give time to the persons requesting the licence to bring more documents.

But if there are stipulated documents that have to be brought, then under what conditions would more documents be required? And, how long would it take? This is something that I think needs to be clarified. I would appreciate that we must seek to make this thing competitive, so that there's no monopoly, and that we must tighten loopholes

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that existed before. And, we understand that and we know certain things may have happened, but is it that, as we seek to tighten those loopholes, are we tightening any kind of chokehold that may result in a lack of information or a lack of explanation on this document?

So I don't see any fees. What would it cost? How long? These are some questions I'm asking myself, and these are some questions that, as the information on the Bill goes out more, I expect there would be some consultation, because early on, this was one of the things that we on the "Opposition Side" had requested. And I think it is still pertinent to ask that we continue the dialogue, so that people are very clear. Because the penalties are very, very heavy. You know when you see EC\$1 million and 10 years imprisonment, and or 10 years improvement or both. And in a number, in another place, EC\$50,000 and it could continue, be a continuous EC\$5,000 until the person complies. So, we need some clarity on the conditions. And I know, I know that the Bill is very lengthy already, and it's just so much you can put in, but as time goes on, I hope that some work will be done to deal with that.

I am pleased to see the issue of predatory pricing that has been put. And again, it's an anti-competitive measure, where it says that the licensee who has significant market power could bring down the price of a commodity, of one of the communication systems, so that they exclude other persons in that field from competing with them. And we have seen what the opening of markets has done for the range of things that people can do and the cost. Because at one time, you couldn't make an overseas call.

(Laughter)

It was prohibitive, and if you call, you make a fast, fast talk, and you run. Now, you know, people speak because there's WhatsApp, there's what have you, there are emails, a number of things. So it has opened up and it has made a lot of difference in the quality of lives and the way that people communicate. And so, we welcome that. And I would really like to see that implemented, any anti-competitive measures that would allow everybody in the market to have a play or have a say in this.

Mr. Speaker, it also speaks to consumer protection. And it's, like, it's one of the

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objectives of the Bill, but I would have liked to see a little bit more meat, especially as we hear the daily complaints and concerns that are expressed by persons. When we travel abroad, and well, I've travelled a few times, but you always get television, you always get your programmes. I hardly, I can't say that having, the few times I've travelled, I've seen any blackout or anything like that, but here it is the order of the day. It goes on and it goes off, and I guess that is, we could call it normal teething problems, until we get to another stage, and so we have to exercise some patience.

But I remember recently asking... so I was out of television for four days, how am I going to be compensated for the four days, and the poor teller or whatever tell me, well, I don't know. Do you all have a policy? Do you have the... No. Well, they don't give back cash, but if you don't give back cash, give in kind. Will you give me a few channels that I cannot pay for, that I don't normally get for a few days? The same amount of time I lost. Is something happening? Nothing so. So customers are really taken for granted, and maybe we need even more competition.

So I welcome that possibility, and I hope that there'd be some... I know, I think... Was there something that was launched recently about consumer protection? But we obviously need that because we have to protect people who do not have a voice, our people who don't or are not used to protesting about these things. Our people are, I mean, over our history we know we have protested for various things, but with those kinds of services I find we need a structured, organised voice that will speak so ... Although it doesn't speak a lot about consumer protection, I hope that a lot more will be done and put in place.

Mr. Speaker, I'm well aware that a minister has to be responsible. And a minister has to have certain duties, but I see latitude there, I see room for mischief, and I know all of our ministers are honourable, so I'm not trying to suggest that they may want to do anything dishonourable. But if there are no boundaries, if the latitudes are not defined, then there is the possibility of that.

So it is a good Bill, it speaks to a number of issues that are really pertinent and relevant to us at this time. And it is timely and I hope to see it enacted, but I hope that as

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we implement this Bill, that we look at some of the shortcoming, and well, I expect to see some amendments, some explanations, some programmes.

Maybe send one of the ministers... my brother from St. George North East, North East, put him on a little programme, let him come and tell us something and so on, so that people will understand and become *au fait*, know what their rights are and what they could do and what is expected of them, what they need to comply.

Because yes, laws are there to restrict people, but I think if people are more knowledgeable and they're encouraged to do right, that may be the better way to go. So, Mr. Speaker, it's a good Bill, and as I said earlier, I look forward to the implementation of the recommendations. And I look forward to Grenada being a power in the communication system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable MP for St. Mark. MP for the town of St. George.

Hon. Peter David: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as indicated by previous speakers on "This Side", we have no difficulty with the Bill. In fact, it was a Bill that was supported by previous governments, and we are discussing some of the issues that arise in this iteration of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I remember the debate and my friend from St. Andrew North West reminds us about the debate, the question on monopoly versus ... and you know there are persons who actually believe that sometimes in some societies that sometimes a monopoly is required. I think in Grenada we welcomed the liberalisation because it has led to benefits. But while we welcome liberalisation, as the Bill indicates, you must ensure that in this liberalised environment and non-discriminatory entry that we are trying to develop, there must be fairness, transparency and accountability. Those are the words used by the Bill itself, and those are the words my friend from St. Andrew South West indicated we're trying to achieve.

So we... first of all, we're giving support, but, of course, Mr. Speaker, there's

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always room for improvement. And that is what I would try to address, particularly Parts X and XI. Part X 10 speaks to Offences and Part XI speaks to the investigation. And I think there are things in there that I want to submit, and I'll not only give my observations, but I will offer some recommendations on how we should approach it. There are some ... You see, in law and particularly when we deal with criminal law, and we are looking at offences and jail and all of these ... because there are some stiff offences here, prescribed. And it means therefore that we have to, in the process, to get there, justice must be done, and I think all of us would agree on that.

And there are two things that are required, two things required: A guilty act which we speak to here, but also the guilty mind. Meaning with something, but it's legal, technical verbiage, *mens rea* and *actus reus*, for those who are, meaning a guilty mind and a guilty act. *Actus reus*, *mens rea*, the mind. In other words, we must show in Part X that somebody intentionally should show somebody intentionally. So let us spend a minute on section 107. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, normally, negligence is not used in criminal conduct, and innocence is a defence.

So let me just go through some of the sections. Section 107 states, "A person shall not connect any equipment to a public electronic communications network without the written approval of the Commission". And there is a penalty for that. The wording of section 107 does not require any intent. In other words, I could innocently do it, without knowing I'm doing it and be found guilty of doing it, without there being an intention on my part. In my view, Mr. Speaker, that needs to be sorted out, because we're talking about severe penalties.

So section 107 (1) talks about that. And so, even if a person unknowingly or innocently connects, they are guilty. We want to suggest in that section 107 (1) that it says, "A person shall not 'knowingly' connect any equipment to a public electronic communications network without the written approval of the Commission", or else we would capture in that net, persons who are innocent.

Mr. Speaker, section 108 says, "A person shall not cause or be used, anything that is capable of causing electromagnetic interference, intercept or interrupt a message,

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remove, damage or destroy electronic communications". A person who commits this act, in the case of a first offence, may be convicted or fined EC\$15,000 or, in the case of subsequent offences, may go to jail for four years. Here too, we're of the view that the net has been cast too wide. All the prohibited acts, under section 108 (10), can be committed innocently, unknowingly or even negligently, which does not normally fall into the parameters of criminal conduct.

To cure it, Mr. Speaker, we again propose for section 108 (a), "Knowingly and intentionally use or cause to be used anything that is capable of causing electromagnetic interference". Subsection (b), again simply add "knowingly or intentionally" and subsection (c), "Knowingly and intentionally remove, damage or destroy an electronic communications network or apparatus".

You see, Mr. Speaker, again, when you criminalise activities and subject people to imprisonment, we need to prove not only that they did something, but that they knew what they were doing was wrong. But there's a way we can cure it later, or come up with another proposal that we have.

Similar issues arise with regard to section 109. 109 says, "A licensee shall not disclose personal information relating to a retail customer except with the consent of the retail customer or under a court order. Here again, we submit that we should say, "A licensee shall not knowingly do it". Because there are ways you can do things without knowing that you are doing it, because of the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

With the... so we, we suggest, "A licensee shall not knowingly disclose personal information relating to our retail customer except with the consent of the retail customer or under a court order". So, Mr. Speaker, again, it refers to the question of a guilty mind, a guilty act.

Mr. Speaker, section 111 (1). 111 (1), we again... It says, "A licensee shall not directly or indirectly hold share capital or voting rights of another licensee in an ECTEL Contracting State". What if somebody owns shares in a licensee in Grenada, and a trust... My friend, the Prime Minister, is much more capable than I am on these matters because they concern some civil issues. A trust in which the person is a beneficiary, may

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without his knowledge one shares in a licensee in St. Vincent, without his knowledge. But he's guilty because this Act does not say whether or not he knows or doesn't know. Once it happens, it means that he or she is guilty. So again, we suggest in that section that we add the words knowingly.

Mr. Speaker, we also have issues with section 113, which talks about, "Where an offence under this Act committed by a body corporate is proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of, or attributable to any neglect on the part of any director, manager, secretary, then that person, as well as the body corporate, shall be guilty. Mr. Speaker, again, we suggest that in this case, neglect should not be one of the issues. Neglect is normally left for civil matters, not criminal matters. It criminalises neglect, which is normally dealt with in civil matters. And in such a position, we ask that the language be changed.

And we suggest that in section 113, it should read, "Where an offence under this Act committed by a body corporate is proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of any director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the body corporate, then that person as well as the body corporate shall be found guilty." If we go into Committee, Mr. Speaker, we can revisit it, if my proposals are going to be on board.

Mr. Speaker, there may be some concern if the Act must be done knowingly or intentionally, as it will make it difficult to implement the Act. But, Mr. Speaker, there is precedent. For example, in drug cases where somebody is found in possession of a drug, that person is in possession. In that law, the prosecution simply has to prove that he's in possession. But, Mr. Speaker, you can allow a defence where the defendant, now the prosecution, has to prove it, beyond a reasonable doubt. A defendant, as in the case here, can simply, not simply, can be allowed to put up a defence which says, to prove on a balance of probabilities... I'm sorry for being a little bit technical, but the AG's Chambers will understand why I'm contra, on a balance of probabilities that I did not know.

In other words, it is open for me to now prove to you, which reverses what we call "the burden" that I did not know that these things were happening. But the way the Bill is structured, that is not there. There is no defence. Even if I can't raise the defence that I

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did not know that I was attaching this thing to this device. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we follow that precedent that is set in drug possession cases, which allows somebody to defend and say, I did not know it was in my car, I did not know it was in my house. Maybe my brother, my sister, or my uncle had it in their possession. In this case, if I can prove I didn't know, then I submit the language of the Bill should be changed to allow such defences.

Mr. Speaker, another area of concern is Part XI. Part XI, section 114 (5) (d) says, any... It adds, "All of the persons... Let's go through it, Mr. Speaker. 114 (5) (d) says, "Subject to subsections (8), (9), (10), (11) and (12), an inspector may perform the following during the investigation. And it speaks about the request that an officer or employee of the licensee or frequency authorisation holder, or any other person, can be brought in.

In other words, a journalist who receives information can be brought in and be subject to the board. So, it allows other people... We are worried about that. It widens the scope... You see, this board has both investigative and adjudicative responsibility, which is a difficult position to be in. Now, we understand the position of the Board. We understand the legislation. But, it says, Mr. Speaker, that they now can come... if a licensee violates, they can go and pull in any other person, outside of the licensee and investigate them. That gives us concern and opens it to possible abuse by the investigative authority, which is the board itself. Because, as I said, they're doing both the investigative and adjudicative roles according to this Act. In other words, they're acting as prosecutor and judge. It's as if the police were judging their own case and giving them the ability to bring in any other person, to me **(sound of time bell)** is opening it.

The last thing, Mr. Speaker, it'll take me one minute, is section 114 (13), which says, "The rules of evidence will not be followed". You see, Mr. Speaker, if journalists can be compelled to come in, you know, we would not have Watergate, we would not have Nixon, we wouldn't have all that, because the journalist could not have been compelled to come in and say what their sources are. What the potential for this is, that in the investigation, you can pull in the journalist because it gives them the right to pull in

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any other person outside of the licensee and people who are authorised by the board.

Again, that opens us up to some potential, what do you call it... Abuse of the rules. Mr. Speaker, and then they say to us, the rules of evidence don't apply. I have to wind down, I can't do anything further. The rules of evidence don't apply. Those of us who practice in courts know the importance of the rules of evidence to ensure that nobody can just come into the hearing and say anything, having ulterior motives or having some reason to want this man to be shut down.

There is no... in other words, it says, Mr. Speaker, that they will not be bound **(laughter)** by what they refer to as technicalities. Technicalities help us in preserving justice. Tacticalities help us in ensuring that innocent people are not sent to jail. Technicalities will help the persons who are in a defence position with respect to this Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is all I have. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for the Town of St. George. Could you just turn off your light, so I could...

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Prime Minister.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd probably say the problem with Criminal Defence Attorneys is that they only think about the criminal. **(Laughter)** You see, the rights of the innocent, the rights of the vast majority of citizens, never matter, Mr. Speaker. It's always the rights of the criminal. So **(laughter)** and, you know, my friend has had to do this dance his whole life, you know, dance before the courts and then dance in Parliament. And sometimes, I think he forgets to switch up **(laughter)**, which hat he's wearing.

And you know, I remember my good colleague from Carriacou, George Prime, suffering a similar fate. I think once, when he was a Senator, he wasn't sure whether he

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should be before the courts or before the Senate. And he was representing a murder accused, and I think by then the judge had had it, in terms of the amount of patience he had extended to Mr. Prime, and he told the client, "Well, you have to find him and tell him, I have equal status before the Constitution as Parliament. And so, if you want to be represented, you have to find your Senator".

So, I think I appreciate that my learned friend is making a case for what he perceives as any potential unfairness to any potential person who breaches the law. Mr. Speaker, the reality is, and he was using Latin terms that, first year law students and so on are familiar with, I will not use those things, other than to say he is acutely aware from his practice that there is something called strict liability, where the fact that it has happened is sufficient to convict you. And you don't even have to have the intent to commit it. So, you know, I don't think we need to have an extensive debate about the fact that adding "knowingly" will not add anything to what was intended.

And, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that... Well, we'll get to that when we're looking at the Bills line by line. But, Mr. Speaker, the fact is, you know, lack of knowledge is not a general defence to criminal behaviour at all. Right? Everybody knows that, and then all of us, after we kill a man, we'll say, "Well, I didn't know I killed a man". **(Laughter)** You know, after I connect to the meter illegally and abstract electricity, I then say, "I didn't knowingly intend to do it. I didn't know". Right?

So, Mr. Speaker, intent is necessary. It is for the person who... The general principle is this: "He who alleges, must prove". And so, if anyone is charged for any potential offence under this Act, the prosecutor has to prove their case in the totality of the circumstances. And the tribunal that is hearing the matter will determine whether or not the case is proven. Any accused persons will have the right to mount any of the defences that are permitted to them under law.

And I say this, because I noticed my friend's presentation. I start there because he was the last one to speak, that's all he presented on, the offences part of the legislation, and that's why I surmised by saying the rest of the Bill, which applies to law-abiding, upright citizens, doesn't matter. All that matters is protecting the rights of those

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who may potentially breach the Bill. But, Mr. Speaker, this is a seminal piece of legislation and I think the indication from all of the speakers indicates that they recognise the importance of the Bill. And so, Mr. Speaker, given its size, I will try my best not to be overly lengthy, but I think it's important that we do go into some detail on certain aspects of the Bill.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is really the end product of treaty obligations that Grenada entered into 20 years ago with other OECS countries, including Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, and St. Kitts and Nevis. Antigua and Barbuda did not take part creating the Eastern Caribbean Communications Regulatory Authority, with sub-branches of the National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority in each of these respective entities at the time to govern telecommunications. And so, you would have had the Telecommunications Act and thereafter, Mr. Speaker, 17 pieces of regulations or subsidiary legislation were passed under the Telecommunications Act. 17.

I highlight this, Mr. Speaker, because I've heard the comments about vagueness and lack of clarity and how it is applied and so on. And the reality is that telecommunications, which has now marshalled really into electronic communication, is a vast, complex and technical area. And so, this is just the parent body and the parent Act. The reality is that, Mr. Speaker, during the transition period, once this Bill is promulgated, you will have a transition period. The existing subsidiary pieces of legislation will continue until they are repealed and replaced by new regulations that will come. And, Mr. Speaker, if we read the Act, we will see that.

Mr. Speaker, the technology has changed so dramatically and so rapidly that a child who's 16 years old, for instance, has never seen a telephone booth. They won't know what a beeper or a pager is. They won't even know what a BlackBerry is. What they know are Samsung's and iPhones. They wouldn't even know what Nokia and Sony Ericsson are. That's how dramatic and rapid the changes are. It's iPads. They probably wouldn't even know what the iPod is, which is where it all started with the music.

And so, Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago, no one was streaming content live, 24 hours a day, Netflix, Roku, Paramount, we can go on and on. So it was recognised that with

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the rapid change in technology, the law needed to keep up. But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, we've not kept. We are already probably 10 years behind in terms of trying to keep up with the dramatic changes. And so, Mr. Speaker, ECTEL, together with the NTRC, together with the Contracting States of which Grenada is one, recognised that in fact the law needed to be changed.

It meant the treaty first had to be changed and, Mr. Speaker, as far back as 2018, Grenada in July of that year ratified the protocol instrument and deposited at the OECS Commission to indicate that it was agreeing with the changes in the treaty that would lead to ultimately the changes in the legislation which is as a first step, this Bill, Mr. Speaker. So all of the five countries ratified the changes to the ECTEL Treaty, and in December of 2019, the revised treaty came into being.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of that, ECTEL commenced a series of extensive and in-depth public consultations across all of the islands. And I'm reciting this history, Mr. Speaker, because obviously I've heard of the talk of consultations. I mean, we are talking back as far as 2009. These consultations have been ongoing. So, from the very countries themselves, consultants were hired. There was an extensive debate about the legislative framework, radio, TV broadcasters, and ministers of government; this has been ongoing, so that people could get an opportunity to comment on this.

There were extensive public notices, and PR firms were hired to go through this process. So by 2012, a first draft of the Bill had been promulgated, it was circulated, and it was presented to the council of ministers that is responsible for telecommunications and electronic communications, for review, as far as 2013. The ministers then agreed to have the draft Bill laid before the legal affairs committee, made up of the attorney generals of the respective Contracting States within the organisation of the OECS.

The draft Bill was presented again to the ministers on the 13th of September, 2019, for review and their input, which was then subsequently sent to the Attorney General Chambers of all of the respective Contracting States. That's 2019. So I'm saying all of this, Mr. Speaker, to say all of this would have taken place under the former administration. The Minister responsible for Telecommunications, then, the Honourable

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Gregory Bowen, perhaps may not have been keeping his colleagues abreast of all the happenings, but all of this was going on. That's over a decade. Right? The attorney general then even came back and made further revisions, particularly clause 157 of the Bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a couple of things that I think it's important to highlight, that the Bill brings in terms of benefits and things that matter to the average person. Because oftentimes, Mr. Speaker, when we have legislation that is this huge, it is perhaps difficult to break down why we're bringing it.

So let's take the concept of number portability, Mr. Speaker. As it stands now, a lot of Grenadians, probably the vast majority, from my observation, have two cell phones. Why is that? Because you have two dominant players in the market. You have Digicel and you have Flow.

If you're an original Flow customer and you want to switch to Digicel, you cannot use your Flow number and go over to Digicel. You have to get a new Digicel number. So as a result, most people, because Digicel to Digicel is presumably cheaper, Flow to Flow is presumably cheaper, they end up with two cell phones. How could that be beneficial to the consumer? You're paying for two cell phones, you have two numbers you now have to remember, and then you could only, essentially, attempt to save cost, you then have to call Digicel to Digicel, Flow to Flow.

What this Bill will do, Mr. Speaker, is introduce number portability in law, which means that if you have a Digicel number and Flow is offering you a better deal, when you switch to Flow, you are switching with your Digicel number if you so desire. And Flow will be obligated in law to use that number. So it means, Mr. Speaker, that it will immediately drive competition and it will reduce costs. Because when you did not have number portability, what it means is that Flow is saying to its Flow customers, essentially, if you want to save, you must keep your Flow to call Flow numbers. Digicel is saying the same thing. If you want to save, you must keep the Digicel number to call Digicel customers.

So, the number portability and the requirement to have number portability means that you can transfer or port your number from one service provider to another. How will

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they get you to switch? It means they have to induce you now. They have to give you some additional benefit, either lower the cost, give you more minutes, superior quality service or something of the sort. So it will drive competition, hence the reason for having number portability.

And it also mandates that no one can operate a clearinghouse. I'm using this... Banks talk a lot about clearing houses, cheques, and so on. Which is, you have to have a system in the background that will allow for the number portability switching to take place, and no one can operate that without permission or being licensed by the Commission. And the reason for this is to prevent people from colluding and preventing the number portability from switching or exploiting it. That's one clear, obvious feature to the average person who is a recipient of services offered by licences in the electronic communications space.

The second principle, Mr. Speaker, the legislation speaks to net neutrality or internet neutrality. And it's defined in the Act. And so let me use the Bill's definition, and then I will use the more common one. One moment, Mr. Speaker. Net neutrality means, "The principle that an electronic communications network and licensees permit all data over the internet by not discriminating, interrupting, throttling, blocking or degrading such data".

Why is this important? It's important, Mr. Speaker, because you see the providers of the internet, the companies, the licensees, if you don't have net neutrality, what it will allow them to do is to slow down, degrade, block or prevent data from reaching the customers, and force you, who may want to receive that data or force the person who may want to provide that data to you, to pay them to speed up or give you access to this data.

And I want to give a brief overview of this. In the United States, for a long period, the ¹FCC, which is the regulator, had maintained the principle of net neutrality. But you know the big boys, the Verizon, the AT&T, it's profit over all else. So they lobbied and they lobbied and they lobbied, Mr. Speaker, to try and get the FCC to repeal this concept

¹ Federal Communications Commission

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of net neutrality. And in fact, the FCC had adopted the repeal of it so that these big companies would, in fact, call it deregulation of the concept of net neutrality. So these big companies would, in effect, be able to actually prevent or slow down certain types of information or certain data from getting to the customers.

Now as luck would have it, the democrats and so on rallied and railed against the concept and they've sought to push back on this very issue, because they recognised what it would actually do is create a situation where the customers would be at a disadvantage, content providers would be at a disadvantage, because those who own the networks, fibre, the cable, could effectively decide there's certain data that never sees the light of day.

So, for instance, if you go online and you want to access a particular website, and they slow this website down, then you obviously lose patience and you go on to the next. So whatever it is you were hoping to see, you simply don't see. Just with that tool, you can control information. Elections, you decide that you can slow down the internet, so content by one particular party, you can find a way of making it very difficult to download, very slow, again, people want to see, it's taking too long, they move on. And we live in an era of instant coffee; if it's not fast, it is not immediate, it's not accessible, people move on.

So you could actually prevent data from getting to persons by simply slowing down their access to it. So that is why, Mr. Speaker, the concept of net neutrality is actually legislated, because as it stands now, we don't have net neutrality. So, in effect, what I'm talking about is probably happening because there is no law prohibiting it from happening. And so, Mr. Speaker, I give these two examples because there are examples that impact citizens.

And what has to happen, Mr. Speaker... **(Sound of time bell)** Already? What has happened and what will happen... Mr. Speaker, thank you. May I have two minutes to conclude, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed, Honourable Prime Minister.

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Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, what has to happen is that, for things like net neutrality and number portability, the regulations have to be enacted. Roaming, I think we all suffer badly from the way we're treated when we have to roam and live outside of Grenada. The cost of data is still prohibitively expensive. Right, these are just examples of things that matter to the average person that the Act is seeking to deal with, that it has never dealt with before, hence the need for a lot of the expansion. And again, all of these things will be dealt with by the regulation. So you know, the question of data and how data is accessed, again, will be dealt with by regulations.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to conclude, I am not sure if I followed my friend for the Town of St. George accurately, but what is Act is doing that the prior Act did not, is to create a separate tribunal from the NTRC to deal with complaints, and to deal with disputes between licensees and consumers, licensees and the NTRC. So it seems that my friend misunderstood the importance of the legislation. It is not seeking to have the Commission be the investigator, the prosecutor and the judge. To the contrary, a separate tribunal is being set up to deal with complaints.

It is clear, it says, the tribunal will be headed by a lawyer of at least 10 years standing, appointed by the Chief Justice, and the two other members will be appointed by the minister, with a skillset ranging from public utilities, accounting, finance, etcetera.

I just want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that all of this, there's no additional financial burden on the state because all of this is part of and has already been budgeted for, as part of what I call the regional ECTEL NTRC budgeting process. So there's no, at this point in time, no likely major financial impact on the state arising from the passing of the legislation. Mr. Speaker, thank you, and I wish to commend the Bill to everyone.

(Applause)

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Prime Minister, for your contribution. Leader of Government's Business:

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Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I simply rise to express my gratitude to Members on both sides of the House for their contribution towards this Bill. And I now commend it to the House. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Electronic Communications Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House resolves itself into a Committee of the whole House to consider this Bill, Clause by Clause or Part by Part. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

House in Committee.

House resumes.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Members, I have to report that the Bill was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment. Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Chairman's Report be adopted.

Question put and agreed to.

Chairman's Report adopted.

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Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the third reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Electronic Communications Bill, 2024.

Deputy Clerk (Ag.): Item 16 – Request for leave to move the adjournment of the House on matters of urgent public importance.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House be adjourned *sine die*.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable MP for St. Andrew's North East.

Hon. Kate Lewis-Peters: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm quite aware that we are all tired and maybe hungry as well, so it's just a short matter that I was asked to bring awareness to the House on, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this matter deals with a group of farmers in the area of Mirabeau St. Andrew. They brought the issue to our attention as Members of the Opposition. So for over 20 years they have been operating, growing their crops and so forth, using an untreated wastewater system for over 20 years with permission. And about two weeks ago, they received a letter from the Ministry of Agriculture indicating that what they have been doing is illegal, and eventually, they will be disconnected.

This letter was sent to them without any form of consultation or communication to

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determine a way forward, if the ministry saw it as an issue. That is a concern the farmers had. For over 20 years, they have been using that system with permission. It is a case where we always speak about the importance of agriculture, the importance of food security and here is an opportunity to meet with the farmers to discuss an issue identified by the ministry, and that did not happen.

Subsequently, after raising the matter with us as Members of the Opposition and upon their request, a meeting was scheduled. The Minister, then, requested a meeting with the Opposition team lead in that area. They met to discuss the issue, but simultaneously, we had Members of the Government intruding on the meeting that was scheduled. And this is of concern. This has been raised as a matter of concern by the farmers.

But what we are proposing here, Mr. Speaker, is that if we say we value agriculture we value farmers and food security and the work they do let us find an amicable solution to this situation rather than just sending a letter to them without consultation to disconnect them on May 8, that was a date in the letter, that they will be disconnected.

So we are just asking on behalf of the farmers who don't have a voice in this House to have an amicable solution going forward, so that will no longer be an issue. It's an opportunity to not just talk the talk, but to walk the walk. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Applause)

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North East. Honourable MP for St. Andrew North West.

Hon. Delma Thomas: Mr. Speaker, I mean, I have to leave for another engagement, but I must respond because I'm the Parliamentary Representative for St. Andrew North West. So I'm wondering who the team lead is and what a team lead has to do with the Honourable House here in terms of who is in charge as it relates to the representative.

And let me set the record straight. Farmers in the area informed me they received

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a letter and so within that same day I informed the Minister for Agriculture and indicated to him that we must have an urgent meeting outlining the same issues that these are farmers who over the years have been using this water and while some have receive permission there are other who actually took on their own and take connection, but if we are saying that we are mysterious about Agriculture then we should look into it and see how we can address the issue.

So a decision was taken. And I'm not sure about meeting with a team lead by the Ministry of Agriculture. That's not my issue. I'm the Representative, and so I have a responsibility to meet with the farmers, and they were all there. 31 of them came out to the meeting. I contacted them when about five of them informed me of this letter and sent me a copy, which I sent to the Minister for Agriculture at the same time. And so I met with them.

I called the Minister for Agriculture and ask if you can join also so that we can hear what the issues are and how best we can deal with ensuring, appreciating that St. Andrew is the breadbasket of Grenada, and appreciating that this is livelihood of these farmers and so we came up with a common agreement.

I would not have any meetings with any team lead. I'm the Representative. I'm not concerned about any political party. I represent in the Parliament. And so, Mr. Speaker, we received a solution and we are working with the Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers to ensure that we continue producing and to look at other incentives that we can provide to farmers through the Ministry of Agriculture and through otherwise so that we can help with production. I thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North West. Whose light is on? Honourable MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I also stand as the Minister for Agriculture and also as the Parliamentary Representative for St. Andrew's South West, which is in boundary with St. Andrew's North West, and I fully support the points made by

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the Member for St. Andrew North West.

Mr. Speaker, we have no problem with the farmers. We met with the farmers, and we are moving swiftly to resolve the issue with the water supply. The problem is that there are many private individuals who are hooked on the water supply illegally. And in the dry season, when the Mirabeau Propagation Station needs adequate water to provide the plantlets for all the farmers, they don't get enough because of this. Good?

So, I personally visited the whole farm. I looked at the irrigation system, and they turned it on for me. There is indeed a shortage of water for the Mirabeau Propagation Station. We identified some of the problems. I met with NAWASA, I think it was yesterday or the day before... I think it was yesterday. I met with NAWASA, and NAWASA said that part of the problem is that there are some broken mains and some tanks that are leaking. NAWASA has, in fact, taken decision they're going to fix those broken mains before Friday, and we are working together with NAWASA to ensure that adequate water supply is provided to the Mirabeau Propagation Station, and, of course, we are joining farmers who also depend on the water for their agriculture purposes. Thank you.

(Applause)

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. Andrew South West, for your input. Honourable MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Hon. Tevin Andrews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't be too long. It is just to invite Honourable Members and, through you, Mr. Speaker, my good friend from St. Mark, who has promised to come up to Carriacou to the Carriacou Maroon and Stringband Music Festival, which is starting this weekend, Friday, tomorrow. We start off in Belmont, my home village, with the cooking of food and all that good stuff, and, of course, on Saturday, we have the Strings in the City.

I saw, through you, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, dancing to stringband music. I never knew he had moves like that, so I could only imagine him on Saturday, providing that he can find time to come up to participate in Strings in the City.

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And, of course, on the night we have a nice festival, I think we have a band from St. Vincent coming, TOUCH, and on Sunday, we have a nice event on Paradise Beach, as well, Cultural Explosion. So, I invite Honourable members and, of course, the general public to come up to Carriacou.

I know that accommodation is limited. From all reports from GTA, all the villas, hotels, and guest houses on the island have the capacity. So, certainly, through the GTA, the Government, we'll have to find ways to increase accommodations in Carriacou, because usually for most of the activities and the events, it's fully booked. But certainly, you never know. Members could pitch a tent **(laughter)** come up and experience this beautiful Maroon and Stringband Festival. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP. MP for St. George North East.

Hon. Ron Redhead: Mr. Speaker, quickly. I would just like to share some of these from the constituency of St. George North East.

We recently held the official ribbon cutting of one of the Call Centres opening its new centre of operation at Beaulieu, Spice Basket, yesterday, in fact. I just want to say that they currently employ about 250 people, particularly young people, and they are looking to add about by the end of this year about 300 more to add to, **(applause)** and will be expanding into 2025. So, the message is that jobs are available and start preparing your CV, come apply and start your place of work at KM2 Solutions, the Beaulieu office.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to update this Honourable House on something that we have introduced in St. George's North East, which is on the issue of cuisine for our inaugural food festival. It will be held at Tempe Playing Field. We have just recently commissioned some work there to ease the flow of traffic in and around the playing field. And we will be announcing finally that we have resolved issues with the lights, and the lights will be available for the community to utilise.

So we're having this on Saturday, 27th. We're inviting the general public and the residents in Tempe to come out to our inaugural event. It's on the board of cuisine, and

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we want to introduce this to the community and, by extension, the constituency of St. George North East. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: I think that has covered it. Yes? Have all the Members made their contributions? So, it was moved by the Leader of Government's Business that this House now stands adjourned *sine die*.

Question put and agreed to.

The Sitting of the House of Representatives adjourned sine die at 1:36 p.m.

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