



GRENADA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

THIRD SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WEDNESDAY 18TH DECEMBER, 2024

***Sitting of the House of Representatives
held on Wednesday 18th December, 2024
at 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 Joseph Andall, MP
<i>(St. Patrick West)</i> | - Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade & Export Development |
| 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 Youth and Sports, 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 |
| Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith C. Mitchell, PC, MP, JP
<i>(St. George North-West)</i> | - Leader of His Majesty's Opposition |
| Honourable. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen, MP
<i>(St. Mark)</i> | - Deputy Speaker |
| 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 Kerryne Z. James, MP
(St. John)

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

Honourable Peter David, MP
(Town of St. George)

- Member
(Excused)

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***Prayers
Minutes***

The Sitting of the House of Representatives began at 9:04 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.

(Sound of gavel)

Mr. Speaker: This Parliament now convenes.

Deputy Clerk: Item 3 – Oath of Allegiance or Affirmation of a New Member.
Item 4 – Confirmation of Minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Leader for Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to the Members of this Honourable House. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes of the proceedings of a Sitting of the House of Representatives held at Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's on Tuesday 26th November, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. be taken as read.

Question put and agreed to.

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***Minutes
Announcements***

Minutes taken as read.

Mr. Speaker: Leader for Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Sitting of the House of Representatives held at Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, and St. George's on Tuesday, 26th November, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. be confirmed.

Question put and agreed to.

Minutes confirmed.

Deputy Clerk: Item 5 – Messages from the Governor-General.

Item 6 – Announcements by Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Members, I have three bits, well, four bits of announcements. The first is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has invited this Parliament to submit a project that they will be funding in 2025. I think the sum is EC\$40,000. So we intend as a Parliament to submit a project to the CPA. Any Parliamentarian who has any project idea in mind can bring it forward to the Speaker for consideration.

I use this opportunity as well to announce the tragic death of Lisa Morris-Julian, MP of Trinidad and Tobago, who died tragically a few days ago in a house fire in Arima. She lost her life, and so did her 25-year-old daughter and six-year-old son. It is tragic in several senses, but the fact that the President of the Senate and I were with the MPs of Trinidad and Tobago two weeks ago in the Red House, and we met Lisa personally hits us a little harder. And so, I want to say to the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago and all MPs across the twin island state that the Parliament and people of

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***Announcements
Papers / Reports***

Grenada extend our deepest condolences to them on the loss of that particular MP in this very, very tragic circumstance.

I also wish to announce that our Governor-General, Her Excellency, is hosting a reception on January 4, 2025, in honour of Doctor Kirani James, on whom the University of the West Indies has conferred an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy. As a people, we are all proud of this distinguished Grenadian son and as Parliamentarians, we want to wish him well. He has represented this country very well, and now, with this Honorary Doctorate conferred on him, in my view, shows, not just how Grenadians consider the contribution of Doctor Kirani James but even outside of our circles. **(Applause)**

And finally, I have been advised that the MP for the Town of St. George won't be with us today. Right. Those are my announcements.

Deputy Clerk: Item 7 – Presentation of Petitions.

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

Mr. Speaker: Leader for Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table the Report on audited accounts from:

1. Grenada Authority for the Regulation of Financial Institutions (GARFIN) – Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2023.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Leader of Government's Business. Honourable Members this particular document is now laid in Parliament.

Deputy Clerk: Item 9 – Unopposed Private Business.

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Item 10 – Questions.

Item 11 – Urgent Questions under the provisions of Standing Order No. 20 (1) (Notice of Questions).

Item 12 – Statements by Ministers.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable MP for St. Andrew North West.

Hon. Delma Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, good morning to everyone. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to update this Honourable House on some of the important initiatives that are taking place in the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Religious Affairs as well as the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Mr. Speaker, faith-based organisations play a critical role in our nation's development by addressing social challenges and fostering community transformation. This Government recognises its importance. Cabinet has approved funding, and the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Religious Affairs issued requests for proposals to enable faith-based organisations to actively contribute to the transformation process through community development and social transformation initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, the initiative provides grant funding for small, impactful projects aimed at addressing key social issues in communities where faith-based organisations operate or have influence. The areas of focus include Education and Skill Development, Youth Empowerment, Health and Wellness, Agriculture and Nutrition Security, Disaster Management, Community Development, and Information and Communication Technology. To ensure equitable access, one project will be implemented in each constituency with a maximum grant of EC\$10,000. However, constituencies with greater needs, like Carriacou and Petite Martinique, St. David, St. John and St. George South, will be allocated EC\$16,500.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that on Wednesday, 11th December, the ministry disbursed funding for six projects under these initiatives.

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1. Agape Business Group Development Project, Agape Ministries, Town of St George;
2. Empowerment through Counselling and Sewing, Birchgrove New Testament Church, St. Andrew South West;
3. Lighthouse Excellence Development Project, Aprestoute Mega Church, St. David.
4. Poverty Reduction through Food Security, Franciscan Institute, St. Andrew North East.
5. Refurbishment of the Morne Longue Camp, Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies, St. Andrew North West.
6. Sustainability, Constantine Methodist Church, St. George North East.

These projects, Mr. Speaker, are designed to create lasting impact in the respective communities by empowering the individuals, fostering economic growth and addressing critical social needs. The ministry will continue to monitor the progress of these projects to ensure accountability and alignment with the initiative's objectives. Mr. Speaker, this is a testament to a commitment to building stronger, more resilient communities by partnering with faith-based organisations to drive meaningful change.

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet has approved the establishment of the National Sports Council of Grenada, which held its augural board meeting on December 10, 2024, at the Kirani James Athletic Stadium. This marks a significant step in advancing sports development and empowering athletes across the nation.

The meeting focused on critical priorities, including promoting grassroots sports participation at the parish level, strengthening partnerships with federations and sporting bodies, and enhancing governance and management within parish councils, board members, including representatives from all parish councils. They reaffirmed their commitment to expanding opportunities to Grenadian athletes and driving initiative that will foster tangible progress.

The Chairman is Mr. Patrick Simmons, who expressed gratitude to the Government for their support and confidence in the council's ability to transform Grenada's sports landscape while also highlighting plans to rehabilitate sports facilities

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damaged by Hurricane Beryl. This inaugural meeting, Mr. Speaker, sets the foundation for strategic action to develop a dynamic sports culture with a focus on inclusivity and collaboration among stakeholders, including Carriacou and Petite Martinique. Mr. Speaker, it is important to know that after the advent of Hurricane Beryl, we had serious devastation in Carriacou, and in 2025, they will be given priority.

Swearing of our Youth Parliamentarian. It is with great pride that I update this Honourable House on the historic election of our first-ever National Youth Parliamentarians. On December 5, over 1,000 registered youth voters, Mr. Speaker, participated in an online election platform to select candidates to represent their constituency marking a significant milestone in youth leadership and civic engagement in Grenada. This election resulted in the formation of a dedicated cohort of 14 Youth Parliamentarians, who will be sworn in early in January, Mr. Speaker, 2025. These young leaders have been chosen to advocate for their communities, amplify youth voices and play an active role in local and national development.

Mr. Speaker, once sworn in, the Youth Parliamentarians will represent their constituency in the National Youth Parliament, ensuring the voices and concerns of young people are heard and addressed; demonstrate the value of youth leadership by providing policy advice to decision-makers on matters affecting the nation's young people; access to \$5,000 community support grant to implement impactful projects within their respective constituencies fostering development and engagement at the grassroots level. To ensure these youth leaders are well prepared, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has committed to providing mentorship opportunities through experienced leaders, organising continuous training and workshops to build their leadership capacity and enhance their ability to contribute meaningfully to national discourse. This initiative, Mr. Speaker, is part of a pilot project aimed at strengthening youth leadership, advocacy and governance in Grenada.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to update this Honourable House that on the 1st of December, we held our National Youth Rally and Award Ceremony appreciating, Mr.

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Speaker, that our young people need to be recognised by us as a Government. And speaking about the Government's commitment to providing for our young people, our own Afy Fletcher was awarded on that day; we have a young Rennie Gilbert who received a scholarship from the Government of Grenada. Mr. Speaker, this Government is seriously concerned about our young people, and so we do not only make promises and deliver on our promises, but we also deliver on the promises made by previous Governments. **(Applause)** And that is why, Mr. Speaker, on that day, Lindon Victor, Anderson Peters and Coach Paul Phillip received their deed and plan; a promise that was made in 2018. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, as a Government, we will continue to provide for our young people, and if you believe that we have done a lot in 2024, just wait until 2025. I thank you. **(Applause)**

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

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and a very pleasant good morning to all. Mr. Speaker, I thought I should use this opportunity to update this Parliament and the nation on some of the major activities that have been taking place within the Ministry of Agriculture.

So this nation would recall that following Beryl's destruction done to the northern part of our island, including Carriacou and Petite Martinique, the Government took the decision to provide income support to our crop farmers, cocoa and nutmeg farmers. And the support took the form of EC\$4,500 to those whose land is up to five acres, and for those whose acreage is greater than five acres, they will receive EC\$9,000. Mr. Speaker, and that wasn't just for registered farmers that was for all farmers who were affected by the hurricane.

I also want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that just before the hurricane, we took out insurance for our farmers with an insurance credit union company called CORPEEF of

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Dominica, and with the passage of Beryl, we were able to receive an additional \$3.4m pay-out for our farmers. **(Applause)**

And you know, Mr. Speaker, I really have to give our Prime Minister the credit for this because we went to him days before the deadline and we said to him, “Prime Minister, the focus for this year is that we are going to have an above-normal hurricane season, and there is need for us to provide some insurance for some of our farmers,” and he readily agreed. We made the \$5,000 payment almost late, almost late, but happily, with our own communication, CORPEEF accepted the late payment, and therefore, we were able to deliver it to our farmers.

So, Mr. Speaker, so far, I want to say to this Honourable House that thousands of farmers have benefited from the programme. In fact, just yesterday, Minister Cornwall had a distribution in Sauteurs. I think he would have distributed cheques to over 20 farmers, and there were more cheques to be distributed, but not all farmers came along. In Grenville, we distributed cheques on two occasions. Last week, we were in Black Bay, St. John, and we distributed cheques to a number of farmers with the support of Minister Kerryne James. The Prime Minister himself distributed a number of cheques in St. David. Those who didn't request their payment by cheque also got their payment going directly to their accounts in financial institutions, and the good thing is that many of them would have called or met me and said, “Thanks, we received the money.” Good. They were very happy indeed.

So far today, Mr. Speaker, we have paid out \$29.8m. **(Applause)** \$29.8m. We've encouraged our farmers not to consume all that money and that they should put back some of that money in the land. And we said to them, we still have nutmeg plants on sale, \$1, and they could still buy manure, NPK—nitrogen (n), phosphorus (p), potassium (k)—12-8-24 and 12-8-2 and the others. They could still buy them as they are available right now at \$1 per kilo, so you can get a 50-kilo bag for EC\$50. Yes.

So we encourage them to put back some of that money in the land. Some have indicated that they will do so. In fact, some have said they are going to plant back nutmeg because some of them were saying, you know, the nutmeg suffered a lot, and the cocoa

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suffered a lot. But we encouraged them to plant back cocoa and nutmeg, and they have given us that commitment to plant back the cocoa and the nutmeg. Good?

So apart from that, Mr. Speaker, in Carriacou, we have assisted our farmers over there. The livestock farmers got the water tanks that they asked for, and they got fencing to assist them with fencing the area as well. So Carriacou wasn't left out of this.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to indicate that as part of our drive to build our livestock industry and to ensure that we have enough meat security in this country, we are expecting some time this month, if not this month, it will be early in the year, we are expecting high-quality breed of ruminants coming into Grenada soon. The planned date we had was December 21, which is the planned date, but they are coming through Amerijet, so, you know, we hope that you know the date is achieved.

And of course, we met with the police, we met with all of the stakeholders, and we explained to them the importance of these animals, good, so we could have a smooth transition of these animals to where they were supposed to go. These animals are for breeding. They are for multiplication. So we're bringing in 165 sheep, high-quality sheep, 158 goats, pro-breed high-quality goats, 144 pigs. Good? They will be located in Laura, in Sauteurs, and, of course, some would also have to go to Carriacou once the farm is ready in Carriacou. The pigs will be housed in Mirabeau, and other arrangements are now in place to have these animals there. **(Applause)**

But, we want to stress, Mr. Speaker, that these animals are not for eating. They are reproduction. They are for breeding because over the next three to five years, what we hope is that with the breeding process that we have in place... 75 farmers have already been identified to receive one, each of these, and they are going to cross-breed with their local, at the same time, they will remain with the Government, and they will also be breeding. So we hope that in three to five years' time, we will have enough of these animals pro-breed Grenadian pig, you could call it spice goat, spice sheep and spice pig **(applause)** because they all would be bred to suit our local condition so that we can have enough meat to feed our population. So that when external shocks and natural disasters hit us, we will be able to depend on ourselves.

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So I stress, Mr. Speaker, that these animals are not for eating. They are for breeding. In fact, if you eat them, you will be unhealthy. **(Laughter)** I know why I am saying that, Mr. Speaker. I know why I'm saying that. If you eat these animals, you're going to be unhealthy, so they're not for eating. They are for reproduction, for breeding to ensure that we have enough quality meat in this country to feed ourselves, I know the reason why I'm saying. The police are involved with us in that regard to make sure that the animals are secure and safe, and we are creating the local conditions for them to survive. They will adapt to Grenada's local conditions so they can become local pigs, spice pigs, spice goats, and spice sheep.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to tell this House that tomorrow, the 19th of December, God's willing, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., the ministry is going to have a Christmas Farmers Market. A Christmas Farmers Market tomorrow at the Ministerial Complex in the car park, which is close to where the passport is there. We're going to have that farmers market there, and we are inviting all of our farmers and all of our agro-processors to come out, display your fresh products and display your agro-processed goods. The population will come out and give you their full support. Good. So thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable MP for St. Andrew South West. Is it the light of the MP, yes, for Carriacou and Petite Martinique? The floor is yours, Honourable MP.

Hon. Tevin Andrews: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I thought it was important that I use this opportunity to update this Honourable House with some of the things that are happening in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. As you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, we suffered a devastating Hurricane Beryl, which destroyed over 90% of housing in Carriacou and left a whole host of other destruction behind.

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Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that after five months and a couple of weeks, significant progress has been made, and it has been a collaborative effort by the Cabinet of Grenada, the various Ministers in ministries who've all pulled their weights to ensure that in such a short space of time, we are coming back to some sense of normalcy in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)** So I am happy to announce, Mr. Speaker, as many of you may be aware, that schools, although they're taking their break now, all schools were reopened in Carriacou. **(Applause)**

It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that some of the schools that were used as hurricane shelters were damaged; significant damage was done to them, for example, the Harvey Vale Government School, the L'Esterre R.C. School, Petite Martinique R.C., Mt. Pleasant, etcetera, Bishops College, and Hillsborough Secondary School. All of those schools, Mr. Speaker, have been paired, and, of course, the schools were accommodated to the students.

Of course, Mt. Pleasant, Mr. Speaker, which sustained a lot of damages, as we speak, work is taking place there and again, commendation must be given to the Ministry of Infrastructure. Although the ministry gets a lot of blows, I think the Ministry of Infrastructure really came through for the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique in getting things done, especially the infrastructural work like our schools and other projects.

Of course, for Dover Government School, which was destroyed completely, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education and Infrastructure will be, and, of course, the Ministry of Carriacou and Petite Martinique will certainly be making announcements as it relates to the rebuilding efforts that will take place there.

But in the meantime, temporary solutions have been made, and the students are enjoying and learning, and we are trying to make it as comfortable as possible for them; meeting with the PTA, meeting with the principal and the staff to hear their concerns and, of course, we are a Government that listens, and from listening, we act.

So, Mr. Speaker, in addition to schools being reopened, I am happy to see the men and women of the Royal Grenada Police Force here. The police station in Carriacou suffered lots of damage, unlike the history of the past, with Hurricane Ivan destroying

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many of our state buildings, one of the first buildings to be renovated was the police station. **(Applause)** So I am happy again, Mr. Speaker, that...

And you see, I want us to pay attention to our actions in terms of ensuring that we put our men and women, our workers, etcetera; you will hear more about it in terms of paying attention to our actions in terms of putting men and women, our people first. It is not just a mantra, but we're actually doing it and making it happen.

Government buildings, Mr. Speaker, ministry buildings, Government offices, etcetera, the people's building, which was destroyed or damaged badly, are reopened or are in the process of being reopened as a result of the repairs that have taken place.

Yesterday was a bittersweet moment; more sweet than bitter, seeing the seniors from Carriacou being relocated back to Carriacou. **(Applause)** You know, I am a big fan of the seniors, and I recall the Prime Minister, without even thinking once or twice, said that all seniors in Carriacou and Petite Martinique who are affected must be moved down to Grenada immediately. The instruction was given to the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Social Development, and the team worked their magic to ensure that our seniors were accommodated.

The Top Hill Senior Citizen Home, Mr. Speaker, was devastated too, was impacted by the hurricane. I am happy and, of course, grateful for the Rotary Club and the Ministry of Social Development, in particular, the Honourable Minister Gloria Thomas and the team at the Ministry of Social Development. At the time, PS Jeremiah moved heaven and earth, working along with the Rotary Club to get our senior citizen home ready in time for Christmas so that our seniors could move back, and yesterday they moved back in, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)** Their family and, of course, the community of Carriacou and Petite Martinique are grateful.

We are continuing to work with Mobilisation, the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Carriacou and Petite Martinique to provide affordable housing for the rest of the seniors who are in Grenada and will soon be moving back to Carriacou in the not-too-distant future, Mr. Speaker.

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Our hospital was also impacted by the devastation caused by Beryl. The roof was blown off, equipment was destroyed, etcetera. I am happy, Mr. Speaker, that our hospital is now fully operational. **(Applause)** A testament to the hard work of this Administration, the Ministry of Health and, in particular, the Ministry of Infrastructure must be given full credit for this amazing work in ensuring that this happens.

Our clinics, Mr. Speaker, all, but one, all, but one were spared. We have five clinics, and the only one that withstood the test of time of Beryl was the Hillsborough Health Centre. But I am happy, Mr. Speaker, to announce that work has started on the repairs of all of the clinics in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. So significant progress is being made as a result of the island's infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, significant roofing material support for the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique has been given by this Administration to the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique; over \$17m, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)** Let me repeat, over \$17m has been spent by this Administration to assist the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique with building and roofing materials regardless of who they are, as long as you are affected, as long as you meet the criteria when the assessment carried out, because it is a transparent, transparent process.

And if you went to Carriacou a couple of months ago and you recently visited, you will see, Mr. Speaker, that most people have started back putting their roofs on. So you'll see less tarpaulins and more galvanised. And the beauty about this, Mr. Speaker, and again, I must commend the leadership of Prime Minister Mitchell in ensuring that the Planning Authority was based in Carriacou and is adequately staffed in Carriacou. So it is not just dishing out monies for building materials, but it is ensuring with the support that the people get through the building materials, that the Planning Authority is right there to guide them to ensure that they build back better, stronger and more sustainable.

In addition to the building material support, Mr. Speaker, the support for the building of homes for our vulnerable citizens, project Build Back Better. And, of course, I want to pause for a minute to say thanks to an organisation from Trinidad, Hands That Serve, that gave 27 homes to the people of Carriacou. **(Applause)** And as we speak,

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over 20 Build Back Better homes are being built, and more homes are on the way to Carriacou and Petite Martinique, which are expected to be here mid-January, Mr. Speaker. So those are some significant progress that is being made. I say to the people, and, Mr. Speaker, I say pay attention to our actions, not what they are saying, pay attention to our actions.

Carriacou and Petite Martinique are now 98% debris-free. **(Applause)** And I know a big hullabaloo was made as it relates to why we are putting the debris in the pastures or the playing fields and so on. Mr. Speaker, at the time, we had no other choice, but to act to try and clean up the place in the shortest possible time frame. I am happy that the Government of Grenada partnered with the Solid Waste Management Authority and bought equipment ensuring that we compact, compile... And should I call it refine? Or to... Well... Well... To ensure that our playing fields after the debris is cleared out, our playing field gets back to its pristine state... So the equipment will not only compact, compress and clean up all the debris in the playing fields, but it will ensure that we bring back the playing fields to their former glory or even better. Mr. Speaker, this is a visionary and action Government. **(Applause)**

The Minister for Agriculture spoke about the income support to our farmers and fishermen in Carriacou and Petite Martinique; significant progress. I am happy that a number of our farmers and fishermen in Carriacou have received the necessary support. We understand, Mr. Speaker, that not all our farmers and fishermen received the payments, but I want to give assurance to the few fishermen who did not receive their pay-outs and the farmers who didn't that come the new year, the Minister and the Ministry of Agriculture along with your Member of Parliament and the Ministry of Carriacou and Petite Martinique will work collaboratively to ensure that the outstanding farmers and fishermen who did not receive their support will get it for the new year. Mr. Speaker, with those few words I now rest my case and thank you so much. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique. I now invite the MP for St. George South to take the floor.

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Hon. Andy Williams: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Morning to everyone. Mr. Speaker, I just want to commend my colleague for Carriacou and Petite Martinique on a job well done. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, from the onset, we have shown that we do not back down from a challenge, and we did not back down from a hurricane, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is a saying, **“When the going gets tough, the tough get going”**, and we are showing, Mr. Speaker, as an Administration, we have taken steps to fight head-on with this challenge we have in front of us that was created by Hurricane Beryl.

Mr. Speaker, Hurricane Beryl hit us on July 1 of this year. On August 27, we came to Parliament, and we passed a Supplementary Budget. Mr. Speaker, as part of that budget, the Ministry of Mobilisation, Implementation and Transformation was tasked with the responsibility of building back. And when I say building back, Mr. Speaker, building back, most importantly, homes for our people, for those who lost their roof. Mr. Speaker, and we all know that a roof is an important thing in someone's life.

Mr. Speaker, we were allocated \$15m to the housing project of Build Back Better, and today, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that we have signed over 200 contracts **(applause)** Mr. Speaker, and they were signed by local contractors. **(Applause)** So, Mr. Speaker, we are seeing in this build-back process the monies that were allocated are being placed back into the hands of our local people, Mr. Speaker, which would build our economy in the process.

Mr. Speaker, we are approximately near completion of our 64 build-back better houses **(applause)** and, Mr. Speaker, they are in the parish of St. Patrick, St. John, St. Mark, and St. Andrew. Mr. Speaker, we have seen now that over 200 families, Mr. Speaker, are being affected, and they are being put into a better place than they were after Beryl. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we have provided employment through the Build Back Better Project for over 1200 local workers, and the local workers I am speaking about were employed by contractors. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker, let me just reiterate this or say this that when we as an Administration speak about “build back better”, we are not only speaking about a building or houses but,

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Mr. Speaker, we are talking about building back or building our people in the process and let me explain.

Mr. Speaker, most of the contractors that are employed under this project are ordinary contractors. Mr. Speaker, for some of them, it's the first time they have gotten a contract of that magnitude in terms of building back. And, Mr. Speaker, you have a majority who were not able to provide funding for the build-back process. So what we did, Mr. Speaker? We engaged some of the financial institutions, and they were able to help by providing funding for these local contractors and houses. This is what happened. By providing the funding for them, they were able to tie the contract to a financial institution, and these institutions can now see the funds going into these contractors' accounts.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is important. What happens now, and we know construction workers do jobs and so on a cash basis, but now that the fund is being channelled through a bank or credit union, Mr. Speaker, they can now have the opportunity to grow their businesses because the institutions can see exactly the amount of funds that are coming through and the contract these contractors are getting.

So, Mr. Speaker, we see some of the companies today in construction, like Creative Designs and so on, who are local companies. We have seen their growth throughout the years. And, Mr. Speaker, by doing this project and this programme, Mr. Speaker, we can now help our local contractors not to stay at one level but to move from one stage to the next. **(Applause)**

And, Mr. Speaker, that is what we are talking about by not just building a building or building back better a building, but also building, Mr. Speaker, our people. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, we have seen over 1400 people in terms of over 200 families being affected, and, Mr. Speaker, this is just 2024. As Minister Thomas said, Mr. Speaker, look forward to even more in 2025. Thank you very much. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. George South. MP, turn your light off, please. I now invite the Honourable Prime Minister to take the floor.

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Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and pleasant morning. I want to take the opportunity right from the onset, as it's the 18th of December, to wish everyone season's greetings and a Merry Christmas and particularly good health for 2025.

I want to express my congratulations to the Honourable Member of Parliament for St. Andrew South East on her election as Political Leader of the New National Party and wish her God's blessings and success in her new role.

I do wish to express some concerns over the absence of the Member of Parliament for the Town of St. George. I hope he is well, and I do wish him best wishes as well. I noticed, Mr. Speaker, you said he will not be with us, but you didn't actually give a reason as to whether he is out of state or unwell. I hope he is well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the presence of the Acting Commissioner of Police, Mr. Randy Connaught, and other members of the senior management team of the Royal Grenada Police Force, who are with us today. I wish to inform the nation, Mr. Speaker, that Commissioner of Police Don McKenzie has proceeded on leave, much deserved, and delayed leave.

The nation may recall I asked Commissioner McKenzie to stay on as Commissioner, passed his retirement date in January of this year, and that was extended to December of this year. But, obviously, even during that period, even for him to do so, he would have had to give up a substantial portion of his leave, but we are all human, and rest is well deserved. I want to put on record my profound appreciation for the decades of service provided to this nation by Commissioner Don McKenzie. **(Applause)**

When I assumed office, Commissioner McKenzie had the title of an "adjunct", a title that was created. We abolished that title, and he became the Deputy Commissioner of Police. And in short order, I think neither he nor myself expected it; he was asked to assume the position of Commissioner of Police on the retirement of then Commissioner Edwin Martin, and he unhesitatingly took up the challenge.

No doubt, we faced, under his tenure, some challenging times. We had to deal with the hurricane and the security consequences that come from a hurricane. We had to deal with an unprecedented upsurge in gun violence leading to homicides of several

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young men. We had to deal with the escape of prisoners from the South St. George Police Station, as well as while in police custody at the Grenville Magistrate's Court. These were difficult times. These were challenging times.

And, in fact, the Commissioner publicly came into a lot of criticism. He remained professional. He remained dedicated. He remained dignified, and he remained committed to always advancing professional law enforcement, not hasty, reactionary or emotional law enforcement. And, so, I want to place on record my appreciation to him **(applause)** for leading the Royal Grenada Police Force during that period.

Under the Commissioner's tenure, he always advocated for his men. And I am going to go on record and say this. Mr. Speaker, there have been more requests for promotions and, perhaps, more promotions of police officers in the last two and a half years than I suspect at any time in the history of the Royal Grenada Police Force. **(Applause)** And Commissioner McKenzie has been at the forefront of always advocating for this.

Mr. Speaker, prior to me getting involved in public life, I learnt of the fact that since, on or around, 1994 or 1995, there has been an outstanding pay and grade and salary scale issue affecting the members of the Royal Grenada Police Force that has gone undealt with for the last 20 or so years, well 30 or so years if you go back to 1994. And this Administration, Mr. Speaker, committed to having the matter addressed.

I'm happy to report that under the Commissioner's tenure, after the Government negotiating team negotiated with the Police Welfare and the other unions that represented public sector workers, that led to the conclusion of negotiations and that led to the signing of a collective bargaining agreement to cover the three-year period, we gave a commitment to the Police Welfare Association that we will address this pay and grade issue. As a result, a committee and I want to name the committee because I think it is important for the public to appreciate that when things happen, there are people who are working hard behind the scenes to make sure that it is a success.

The committee consisted of Joseph Layne, who, in fact, is a representative of the Police Welfare Association, Mr. Teron Greenidge, Ms. Shanae DeCouteau, Ms. Rachel

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Brizan, Ms. Alisha Durrant, Ms. Deborah Cadore and Ms. Everil Bornaparte and they have done substantial work over the last year on this matter. We believe we are now in a position where early in the New Year, we will be able to once and for all address this matter of pay and grade **(applause)** for members of the Royal Grenada Police Force. And I just want to give context so people would understand what I mean by this.

Ernst Young had been commissioned to do a study to assess the terms and conditions of police officers contrasted with other public sector workers. The police had raised a number of issues, their working hours, their patterns, the long hours, the danger, the risk, the adverse working environment, and I will come to this in a while, Mr. Speaker, the range of roles and mission creep that has been burdening the RGPF, leave entitlements, loss of public holidays, impact on pension allowances, and inconsistent treatment compared to other public sector service groups.

Now after Ernst Young did their assessment, their key conclusions noted that the salary structure implemented in 1995 and 1996 undervalued police roles, especially at ranks PO2 and PO3, constable, corporal, and sergeant and that there were significant inconsistencies between police and public officers and, in particular, when compared to the teachers scale and it resulted in police officers being at a disadvantage in terms of salary progression relative to other public officers and teachers at equivalent levels.

And so, Mr. Speaker, those are the issues that we have sought to address over the last year and we have the recommendations in by the Committee. We believe the Police Welfare Association, with some further discussions, will agree to the recommendations. We look forward to, in fact, having those implemented so that we can address these matters.

So I raise this, Mr. Speaker, to point out again, in keeping with what the Honourable Member of Parliament for Carriacou and Petite Martinique said, judge us by our actions, not by our talk. We don't engage in megawatts of talk. We engage in megawatts of action. **(Applause)** So, again, Mr. Speaker, a matter outstanding since 1995. Do you know where I was in 1995, Mr. Speaker? I was in National College. I was in Theophilus

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Albert Marryshow Community College at Tanteen. Since 1995... So it tells you how long this matter is outstanding.

Mr. Speaker, by way of information, I wish to advise that, as I said, Acting Commissioner of Police Randy Connaught will act as Commissioner of Police until the leave entitlement of Don McKenzie expires. Deputy Commissioner of Police Jessmon Prince, who is also here, Mr. Speaker, has been extending service to the Royal Grenada Police Force and the good people of Grenada beyond his call of duty, and we have asked him to stay on, Mr. Speaker, until the middle of 2025. We want to again place on record our appreciation for his commitment and his willingness to work beyond retirement age in the interest of the Royal Grenada Police Force. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, further announcements will be made pertaining to the management of the Royal Grenada Police Force.

I also wish to place on record, Mr. Speaker, that we have moved speedily to commence work on a building in Grenville, and we expect that the work will be concluded shortly in the New Year so that the Grenville Police Station can be relocated and so that the man and women who are housed and who have to do business and serve the public at the Grenville Police Station would be doing so in significantly enhanced premises in Grenville. **(Applause)**

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, we are drawing down to the conclusion of work on the Police Headquarters, which is being relocated at what was once, in those days, GRENTEL, Cable and Wireless and then the FLOW headquarters building, which also for a short period of the time housed the Supreme Court building. The work is ongoing. It is near completion, and I daresay anyone who drives by, would be hard-pressed not to be impressed by the significant transformation of the building. So, Mr. Speaker, we are not just committed to improving the physical infrastructure under which our law enforcement officers serve, but as I said, we are also committed to addressing the terms and conditions by which they work and improving the terms and conditions under which they serve the public.

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So there are obviously several other buildings that need urgent attention, but I think, as highlighted by the Member of Parliament for Carriacou and Petite Martinique, the Ministry of Infrastructure has enormous responsibilities stretching across the entire country and the entire Government service. So for those who are currently in circumstances that are less than ideal, obviously, your request would be to ask them to exercise patience.

I hope a hurricane every year does not become a norm. But you would appreciate, Mr. Speaker, obviously, with a hurricane, there's been significant disruption; not just hurricanes but heavy rains have led to significant flooding and damage to public infrastructure as well as private homes as well, and that's the added challenge that the Ministry of Infrastructure has to treat with. But notwithstanding that, I think we can demonstrate that the ministry has taken on and has delivered in significant ways on many infrastructural projects both pre and post-Hurricane Beryl.

So I want to go on record to thank the staff at the Ministry of Infrastructure, the current Acting PS Alva Brown, PS Sylvia Bennett-Thomas, the Chief Technical Officer Mr. Kevin Blache and other senior persons, Ms. Ray Goddard, the Senior Administrative Officer and others there, who have worked tirelessly to address a lot of the physical challenges that we face in Grenada.

Mr. Speaker, in the interest of time, I will conclude, but the next time I get an opportunity to make statements under Ministerial Statements, I will address the prison service. Oftentimes, the Prison, rightfully so, states that they feel like the outside child because very little appreciation is shown to them and their institution, given the significant role they play in the safety, peace and stability of this country. And I want to assure them under my watch as Minister for National Security that they will not, in fact, be treated like the outside child. They are an integral part and parcel of the family and the institutions that make this country a safe place for all of us. So, Mr. Speaker, again, I thank you for the opportunity. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

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Motions

Bills: Public Sector Employees (Pension Fund) Bill

Deputy Clerk: Item 13 – Personal Explanations.

Item 14 – Motions.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion:

WHEREAS debate on the Gracious Address delivered by the Governor-General on the occasion of the Ceremonial State Opening of the Third Session of the Eleventh Parliament on Friday, 4th October 2024, was deferred to a date to be named;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the said Address be now further deferred to a date to be fixed.

Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion approved.

Deputy Clerk: Item 15 – Bills.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for the first reading, a Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Public Sector Employees (Pension Fund) Bill, 2024.

Deputy Clerk: A Bill which seeks to establish a contributory pension scheme for public sector employees, shortly entitled, Public Sector Employees (Pension Fund) Bill, 2024.

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Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the relevant Standing Order of the House be suspended to enable the Bill to be taken through all its stages at this Sitting.

Question put and agreed to.

Relevant Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

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

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Public Sector Employees (Pension Fund) Bill, 2024 seeks to establish a contributory pension scheme for public sector employees; to provide for the establishment of a Fund from which the payment of pensions, gratuities and allowances are to be paid to such employees; also, Mr. Speaker, to provide for the establishment for a Board of Trustees to manage and administer the said Fund, and to provide for other relevant matters.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill in question consists of eight parts and 79 clauses and due to the shared length of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, I will attempt to discuss what I consider some of the more pertinent aspects of the Bill, and I imagine my colleagues would assist and support in other areas.

But this Bill, Mr. Speaker, if as Grenadians we are to recall our history, we would recall a very stirring campaign of 2018 in which, Mr. Speaker, pensions, as it were, were on the ballot and disappointingly so, Mr. Speaker, the said pension that was so spoken

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of eloquently and so well promised was never delivered. It took, Mr. Speaker, a new, young, brilliant and dynamic team led by our excellent Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, and **(applause)** to introduce today this Bill responding to the needs of our public servants. So this Bill, Mr. Speaker, on this day, the 18th day of December 2024, must go down as part of history-making. **(Applause)**

Part I of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, comprises four clauses. It treats with the short title and aspects of definitions and scope. The scope and application of this Act, Mr. Speaker, section 3 subsection (1) reads:

- (1) Subject to the provisions of this section, as from the date of operation of this Act, the provisions of this Act shall apply to—
- a. all new public sector employees;
 - b. It shall also apply, Mr. Speaker, to “all public sector employees who—
 - i. hold non-pensionable offices by virtue of a relevant enactment; or
 - ii. have neither attained the age of 50 nor have been employed with the Government of Grenada for a period exceeding 15 years.
 - c. all employees of the Government who are currently employed in the public service on a contractual basis and by virtue of the terms and conditions of this contract, are not eligible to receive a gratuity;
- (2) However, Mr. Speaker, this Act shall not apply to—
- a. employees of the Government who are employed in the public service on a contractual basis, whether fixed term or otherwise, and who by virtue of the terms and conditions of their contract, are eligible to receive a gratuity;
 - b. Also, Mr. Speaker, those employees of the Government who are currently employed in the public service for a period exceeding 15 years and are already 50 years old;
 - c. It shall not apply, Mr. Speaker, to temporary employees; and
 - d. neither persons who are seconded from statutory bodies or agencies of Government that have their own pension arrangements.

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(3) Therefore, Mr. Speaker, for the avoidance of doubt, the law to be applied with respect to the payment of pensions, gratuities and other allowances to—

- a. a public officer;
- b. a teacher;
- c. police officer; or
- d. prison officer

who has been so employed, prior to the date of operation of this Act, and is eligible to receive a pension, gratuity or other allowance, shall be the relevant enactment which applies to such public officer, teacher, police officer or prison officer; save and except where such public officer, teacher, police officer or prison officer opts for the provisions of this Act to apply to them in this regard.

Part II of the Bill. Part II of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, contains and comprises clauses 5-8. Clause 5 provides for the establishment of the Public Sector Employees Pension Scheme, and clause 6 provides for eligibility requirements for members of the said scheme and the obligations of a member to make mandatory contributions to the Fund.

Membership of the Scheme. Section 6 subsection (1), Mr. Speaker, speaks:

(1) As from the date of operation of this Act, a public sector employee to whom the provisions of this Act apply, by virtue of section 3 subsection (1), shall be a member of the Scheme and shall be required to make mandatory contributions. So the said members, Mr. Speaker, to whom the Act applies and to who qualifies under this Act shall be required to make mandatory contributions. Mr. Speaker, in like manner, the employer is also required to make mandatory contributions.

(2) A public sector employee who has been so employed for a period of three months or less, shall not be eligible for membership of the Scheme or be required to contribute to the Fund. And, of course we spoke to temporary employment earlier, and that is the context in which such employee may not be so required to contribute.

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(3) However, Mr. Speaker, a public officer, teacher, police officer or prison officer who is so employed on the date of operation of this Act and eligible to receive a pension, gratuity or other allowance in accordance with the provisions of any of the relevant enactments, may in the prescribed manner, within twelve months after the date of operation of this Act, may now opt to become a member of the Scheme by completing the relevant registration, documentation, and thereafter being accepted by the Scheme by virtue of approval of the Board of Trustees. Thereafter, Mr. Speaker, the Act will now apply, and the said member will now have to make their mandatory contributions into the Scheme.

We now move to Part IV, Mr. Speaker, that speaks to the Establishment of the Board of Trustees. So the Board of Trustees, Mr. Speaker, shall consist of the following appointed Trustees who are so appointed by the Governor-General, acting on the advice of the relevant Minister. And the composition of the said Board, Mr. Speaker, consists of the following:

- a. the permanent secretary with responsibility for public administration; and
- b. the permanent secretary with responsibility for finance.
- c. These two Board Members, Mr. Speaker, and Trustee Members, are deemed *ex officio* Members of the Board. There are seven other members on the Board, and they consist of the following;
 - i. an attorney-at-law of seven years practice;
 - ii. an actuary having the necessary qualifications and experience;
 - iii. a person who has demonstrable knowledge of finance;
 - iv. a person who has at least five years' experience in human resources management;
 - v. an investment expert who has demonstrable knowledge in investment management and someone appointed or so named by a trade union representing public sector employees; and
 - vi. one person representing statutory bodies.

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Altogether, Mr. Speaker, we speak to a Board of Trustees consisting of nine Members: two permanent secretaries, one from finance, the other from the department of public administration, and the other seven are professionals from different callings with different expertise to add to the structure and competence of the Board.

Mr. Speaker, one would recognise the importance, Mr. Speaker, of these appointments to add value to the Board. So it's not just there just to make numbers, but the different relevant training and you would recognise in the Act, Mr. Speaker, that certain level of experience, years of experience is required, and that would basically add to the value of their contribution on the Board. Contributory Schemes, Mr. Speaker, are not necessarily easy schemes to manage and therefore, the presence of someone with actuarial knowledge, as stated earlier, is also important because actuarial as well as investment and so on, all of these skill sets are absolutely necessary for building a strong framework for the management of the Scheme. And this again underscores the Government's commitment to ensuring that the Scheme is set up, well set up and well managed and that there is something there to protect our employees on their retirement.

This, Mr. Speaker, is in addition to the National Insurance Scheme retirement benefits. I make this point because one must appreciate that the NIS serves its good purpose, but over the years, what we've recognised is that our public officers, after they retire, many, or I should say the vast majority, retire into poverty. The vast majority, Mr. Speaker, retire and have to depend on SEED to live, which is a Social Programme implemented by the Government. What we are trying to do here, Mr. Speaker, is to build a framework to ensure that our public officers, when they retire, are protected, and this we deem very important.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at what has been happening over the last two and a half years, one could safely conclude that this NDC Administration, in fact, is the most pro-worker Government (**applause**) in recent history. If we roll back the curtains for two and a half years, the amount of investments, the amount of money and everything else that goes along with it that we've put into the hands of our employees or public servants; the time we have taken to restructure the public service and to ensure that our public

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servants work with a sense of professionalism and independence, one could safely conclude that this Government is very serious of building a strong and vibrant public service. **(Applause)**

So I move to the Tenure of Appointment of the Board. This too, is important, Mr. Speaker. So a Trustee appointed to the Board pursuant to the Act shall be appointed for a period not exceeding three years, and the appointment shall be effected in such a manner that will ensure, as far as possible, the expiry in any one year of the term of office of not more than one-half of the said Trustees would leave the Board at any one time. And that is important for continuity and succession planning because you want to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that the skillset and the competence and the experience from serving on the Board is always intact, and so the membership on the Board is likely to be staggered to ensure that at least half of the Board will always be retained while we have others being rotated.

The Appointment of Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Board. The Governor-General, Mr. Speaker, acting on the advice of the Minister, shall so appoint a Chairman and a Deputy Chairman on the Board from amongst the Trustees appointed as per section 11 (4)(c). So, in the case where the Chairman is unable to act, the Deputy Chairman, Mr. Speaker, will act in his or her stead.

Mr. Speaker, we now move to section 25 of the Act, where we take a look at the general rules relating to investment transactions of the Fund. And, again, this is very important because the idea behind all of this is to ensure that the Fund remains strong, that the Fund lasts into perpetuity as much as it is humanly possible and that the pension remains relevant to the employees and that they are motivated to continue to contribute to the scheme. If built out properly from the onset, it is likely to succeed. So here are some of the general rules as per section 25 of the Act.

(a) no investment, Mr. Speaker, shall be made without the prior approval of the Board.

And this, too, is important because the overall governance of the Fund is a critical component in ensuring that the fund actually last.

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(b) all investment transactions shall be undertaken at arm's length, and all prices comparable in the market for similar investment transactions shall be so made. So the price comparisons, the market analysis and all of these are critical things for decision making must happen, Mr. Speaker, at arm's length transactions and inquiries

(c) all investment transactions shall have the authorisation of the Board, and be consistent with the investment policies, standards and procedures as established pursuant to section 23 (1)(f).

So, Mr. Speaker, the policies, the standards, the procedures and all of these things that are set up within the framework of the management of the Fund, the investments shall be in line with all of this to ensure that the proper governance and management of the Fund actually happens.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we are trying to do is to ensure that all of our public officers who qualify under this Fund actually get a pension on retirement. So we are setting this in such a way, Mr. Speaker, that the Fund, by law, must be governed properly. So you ask the question, who is it that is really seeking the best interest of public servants? Who is it that guarantees that when public officers give up their lives for decades, sometimes 30 and 40 years, some of them work, Mr. Speaker, and have to retire after, who is it that really stands with the employee? Who is it, as we put in inverted commas, "like poor people"? This, Mr. Speaker, guarantees, and we're not even talking about all the actions that we've taken to ensure that the minimum wage of employees is protected and the salary adjustments have been made and so on, and so on. Who is it, Mr. Speaker, that really seeks the interest of our public officers and really seeks the interest of the small man and poor people, as we put it?

Mr. Speaker, this day, Mr. Speaker, must be considered as a day of history-making in Grenada. **(Applause)** We are not simply talking and making empty promises. Yes, in fact, we made this promise that we are going to implement a pension. Today, Mr. Speaker, is yet another fulfilment of the promise that we've made. Today marks, Mr. Speaker, another commitment to the working people of this country. And I hope, Mr.

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Speaker, that the private sector also takes note of this and they, too, should put their own pension fund in place.

Let's move, Mr. Speaker, to the actuarial valuation of the Fund, section:

- (1) The first actuarial valuation of the Fund shall take place at the end of two years after the Fund is established, and thereafter, the Fund shall be valued at intervals not exceeding five years by an actuary appointed by the Board.

So, Mr. Speaker, the actuary on a whole makes, and that's an independent actuary we're speaking about; remember, Mr. Speaker, when we spoke about the composition of the Board, we spoke of someone who had actuarial experience and knowledge to sit on the Board. This actuarial valuation we're speaking about is an independent actuary who, after the first two years, shall evaluate the Fund and make recommendations to the Board for implementation, and thereafter every five years at minimum, the actuary shall again continue to evaluate the Fund and ensure that the growth of the Fund is in line with what is expected in order to secure the life of the Fund, to ensure that it remains a viable fund.

- (2) The actuary, Mr. Speaker, shall—
- a. prepare a report on the state of the Fund; and
 - b. recommend any necessary action to be taken by the Board.
- (3) Thereafter, Mr. Speaker, a report submitted pursuant to subsection (2) shall be submitted by the actuary to the Board within one month of receipt thereof, that said report shall be submitted to the Minister with responsibility for public administration;
- (4) And within two months of receipt of the report submitted pursuant to subsection (3) the Minister responsible for Finance shall cause the said report to be laid at the Houses of Parliament.

So what we're seeing here, Mr. Speaker, is that throughout the entire process, the accountability of the Fund is underpinned by different levels of reporting to the Board, to the Minister for Finance to Parliament. So, at all levels, that thread of accountability runs through the operation of the Funds at all levels.

Annual estimates, section 34:

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(1) No later than three months before the end of each financial year, the Board shall cause to be prepared, estimates of revenue and expenditure of the Fund for the next financial year.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the budgeting, preparation and forecasting of information for the consideration of the Board is also a critical component so that at least expenses can be properly managed and monitored in accordance with the budget.

(2) These estimates of revenue and expenditure prepared pursuant to subsection (1) shall be submitted to the Minister for his approval and after such approval, the Board shall not increase the annual estimates without the approval of such Minister.

So again, Mr. Speaker, the thread of accountability runs through the entire process.

(3) The annual estimates shall make provisions for the estimates of expenditure of the Fund for the financial year and in particular, shall provide for—

- a. the payment of salaries and other allowances in respect of the Trustees and members of the committees and such other persons contracted by the Board of Trustees; and also
- b. any other administrative cost of expenses.

The Audit of the Fund. Section 35.

(1) The accounts of the Fund shall be audited by an auditor appointed by the Board and approved by the Director of Audit.

So this allows, Mr. Speaker, that, of course, an independent audit be conducted each year, an auditor of the choosing of the Board. However, the approval must be given from the Director of Audit, and that is normal.

(2) The board shall, within six months after the end of each financial year, cause to be made and transmitted to the Minister—

- a. A statement of the accounts of the Funds;

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- b. A report regarding the state of affairs of the Funds, the business and the financial position of the Fund, which includes the financial position, the statement of accounts, and cash flows; those should be so submitted.
- (3) The Minister shall cause a copy of the said report together with the annual statement of accounts and auditor's reports thereon to be laid in both Houses of Parliament.

Part V of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, comprises clauses 40 to 46, and this sets out the manner in which the contributions are to be made to the Fund. I believe this one again is very important for our public officers to note. We spoke earlier about the mandatory contributions of the member and we're also going to speak a little about the mandatory contribution by the employer. All right. So just a few more minutes and we should be able to wrap up. Excuse me.

Part V, section 40:

- (1) Each member shall make monthly contributions to the Fund at the rates set out in Part A of Schedule II, which shall be deducted from the salary of the member by the Employer.
- (2) Where the Employer fails to deduct the member's contribution, the sum may be recovered in the subsequent months, and any penalty payable thereon shall be paid by the Employer.

So Part A, Schedule II speaks to the contributions that members may make to the Scheme or shall make into the Scheme. I think we're talking law, so I have to speak properly; members shall make the following contributions: salaries not exceed the maximum insurable earnings as defined pursuant to the NIS Act Cap. 205, 3%. So that is salaries not exceeding the maximum insurable earnings. If you're not exceeding the maximum insurable earnings, as per the NIS Act Cap. 205, you pay 3%. If the salary so exceeds the maximum insurable earnings as defined under the said Cap. 205, NIS Act, the contributions are 6%. So, in other words, the higher-paid employees get to pay a little more into the Fund.

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The Employer contributions. We just dealt with the Employee. Employer. An Employer shall make monthly contributions in respect of each member as follows—salaries not exceeding the maximum insurable earnings as per Cap. 205, NIS Act the said 3%. In other words, to make it simple, the Employer pays 50% of the contributions; the Employee pays 50% of the contributions. So it is split down the middle. So the same for those that have a salary exceeding the maximum insurable earnings the Employee, sorry, sorry, sorry, for salaries exceeding the maximum insurable earnings, the Employer pays 6%. All right. So, it's the exact replica of the Employee contribution. So it's basically a 50/50. I think we got that.

Section 41 (1)(a), where the Employer is a statutory body that is— one that receives a Government subvention... Because there is a distinction, Mr. Speaker, where the Employer, because as indicated earlier, statutory bodies, yes, may be able to join the Scheme. However, where the Employer is the statutory body, there's a distinction between those who receive a Government subvention versus those who do not receive a Government subvention. So where the Employer is a statutory body that does not receive a Government subvention from the Government contributions may be made at the rate at rates to be determined, upon agreement of the statutory body and the member, which shall not be lower than the rates applicable to, as per, sub-paragraph (i) above.

In other words, what this is saying is that if it's a statutory body that does not receive a Government subvention, the contributions may be made at the rate that will be decided or determined upon agreement of the statutory body and the member. In other words, the... Because, you know, the statutory bodies have their separate arrangement of employment at the unions and all of that. So they will negotiate what those rates are. However, those rates shall not be lower than the rates stipulated earlier in the Act. You can be higher, but now lower. So, in other words, this guarantees those not receiving a Government subvention, if you want to call it, a minimum pension as per the statutory bodies that do not receive a subvention.

Those that receive, Mr. Speaker, a subvention, those that receive a subvention from the Government contributions shall be made at the rates set out as per the Schedule,

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just spoken of, Part B of Schedule II, just spoken of, which is the 3% or the 6% in accordance with the Cap. 205 of the NIS Act.

So, Mr. Speaker, I took the time to speak to this because I believe it is important for us to understand how the contributions are to be made and the rate at which those contributions are to be made. I want to pause and inject into the conversation, Mr. Speaker, the importance of these contributions.

What is this doing, Mr. Speaker? This is actually setting aside compulsory savings towards retirement. That is what the contributory Scheme is. But, the Government or the Employer and the Employee make equal contributions into a Fund that guarantees a set amount at the end of your retirement or a calculably amount based on the formula at the end of your service and commencement of your retirement.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have to be careful about these things and understand that, yes, a 3% or, in other cases, a 6% one might say I'm actually going to be taking home less money. I am putting forward this here to say, that this is not about taking home less money. This is your money. This Employee who is making contributions to this Fund has an account just as how you have an account in the bank; you have an account in your fund, and this account guarantees you financial returns at the end of your working life. The money is yours. Nobody is taking this money away from you.

You're not paying an additional tax. This is not a tax. If we wanted to introduce a tax, we were going to introduce a tax. So let us not be fooled about this. And I use this respectfully, Mr. Speaker, let us not be fooled about this. This does not look like a tax, it does not smell like a tax, and it is not a tax. This is an investment that an Employee makes into securing his future and his retirement. And this is the wise thing to do, and you're not making it alone, your Government is making an equal contribution with you to ensure that your retirement is protected.

So that is what this is seeking to do, and that is why it is called a "Contributory Fund", and that is why there is an independent board, that is why an actuary is in the mix, and this is why there is accountability running all the way through up to the Parliament of Grenada to ensure that what we say is yours, your account is maintained throughout the

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process and that you're able to receive your money and the end of your employment with the Government or the so named statutory body.

Mr. Speaker, I'm almost done. I hope. Yes, I'm almost done. I refer us, Mr. Speaker, to section 42, which speaks to Voluntary Contributions.

(1) In addition, Mr. Speaker, to mandatory contributions required under section 41, a member may, upon approval by the Board pursuant to an application made in the prescribed manner, make voluntary contributions to the Fund at a rate as may be determined by the member, save an except that such rate shall not exceed the rate as set out in Part C of Schedule III, which is 10%.

So the maximum rate of voluntary contribution by a member is 10%. Right.

(3) A public officer, teacher, police officer or prison officer who is not a member of the Scheme may, upon approval by the Board, pursuant to an application made in the prescribed manner, make a voluntary contribution to the Fund at a rate as may be determined by such public officer, teacher, police officer or prison officer, save and except that such rate shall not exceed the rate set out in Part C of Schedule III, which I just read, 10%.

I'll just deal with this last, penultimate section. Section 43, past service credit contributions.

(1) Subject to the provisions of this section, Mr. Speaker, an Employer shall pay into the Fund, in respect of an employee who is a member of the Scheme at the date of operation of this Act by virtue of section 3 (1)(b) or (c), past service credit contributions calculated in accordance with Part D of Schedule II, which is the 3% and 6% according to Cap. 205 of the NIS Act, just for reference.

(2) The payment of any past service credit contributions into the Fund by an Employer pursuant to subsection (1), just read, may be phased in over a period of five years. So past service contributions may be phased in over a period of five years after the date of operation of this Act, in such manner as may be specified by the Employer, until the amount is fully paid or liquidated.

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Change of Employer: a final piece that I wish to bring to our attention which I think is critical for our understanding because there will be a transition, and our public officer, statutory employees and so on must appreciate these critical components. So final little piece, Change of Employer. Section 45, Subsection (1):

(1) Where a member changes employment from one Employer to another Employer or to an employer who does not contribute to the Fund, the same retirement savings account shall be maintained for the member.

Earlier, Mr. Speaker, I spoke about each Employee, or as for the Fund, each member having an account in the Fund. So, the same retirement savings account, you have a retirement savings account, shall be maintained for the member. And let me mention this as just knowledge.

I know, Mr. Speaker, in the UK, for example; my studies were UK-based studies. So there's something called "retirement savings account" which can be used as part of a security for conducting business. I hope at some stage that can be applicable because it's real money. It is your money set aside. It is not a tax, and if we apply it sensibly, one can leverage his retirement savings because it is yours or your dependents' own if you die. You can actually leverage that for borrowing purposes, for example, or investment purposes. Just saying.

Subsection (2) finally, finally:

(2) Where a member or a person specified under section 42 (3), sorry. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'll just take this again. I guess I'm a bit tired. I don't usually talk for this long. Where a member or a person specified under section 42 (3) is no longer employed by a participating Employer, the member shall be eligible to make voluntary contributions to the Fund in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

And, Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the end of my notes that I wanted to share with the House. I think this particular Bill is one that was long in coming. I know we've been working on it for, I would say, maybe close to two years that we've been working on this Bill and we have the privilege of presenting it this morning to this Parliament.

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I want to commend the Department of Public Administration, Legal Affairs, Ministry of Finance and all the other ministries, departments, staff and the leadership of our Prime Minister, of course, for really taking this Bill to where it is this morning to be able to present it to the Parliament of Grenada. I think it is a well-thought-out Bill. I had the pleasure of reading through all of it, and I thought it was well crafted. So I want to commend the drafters, the crafters, the workers, the employees and the leaders who led this process through.

I now commend this Bill to the House for debate, and I ask please, on “Both Sides” of the House, we need your support, and we need your endorsement of this Bill. This is not about us. This is about the employees who’ve worked for many, many years in the system and are, in fact, indeed, deserving of a pension. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
(Applause)

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Leader of Government’s Business and I now invite the MP for St. Patrick West to now take the floor.

Hon. Joseph Andall: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I deal with the substantive matter, I wish to take this opportunity to wish you, Mr. Speaker, and your staff, family, Members of this Honourable House and indeed the people of Grenada a very happy, healthy and prosperous holiday season.

I’d also like to congratulate the Honourable Member of St. Andrew South East on her ascension to the leadership of her party, and I daresay, if I might be so presumptuous, soon the Leader of the Opposition. **(Laughter)** That’s why I said presumptuous.
(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this Bill. I’ve been a Member of this House for about two and a half years, and whenever I have consultations with my constituents, one of the things that always come up is the question of monetary assistance for people who have no pension or who have a NIS pension but can barely make ends meet. I’ve come across people, Mr. Speaker, who have worked in the public service for over 30 years, but

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who, because of the vagaries of their terms of employment, are not entitled to a pension having done the exact same job as other people who, fortunately, were classified as “established workers”. This, Mr. Speaker, is really an unfair and unfortunate situation. It is therefore incumbent upon us, as a caring nation and particularly as a Government, that we take steps to address this anomalous situation, and that is why we bring this Bill before the Parliament, and I give it my 100% support.

Mr. Speaker, what this Bill does is to give people who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to get a pension the chance for them to invest in their own future and, moreover, to have the Government or their employer contribute a matching sum at minimum. It is as if you have established a savings account for yourself, and every time you make a deposit into your account, the Government decides to give you an equivalent amount. Therefore, you are a winner on both counts;

1. You are contributing towards your future upkeep and maintenance; and
2. At no further costs to yourself, the Government is also contributing.

And, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that any reasonable person can argue against a set-up like that because the alternative to it is what currently exists: you retire, and you get nothing.

Some of those who may be seeking to insight workers to not support this measure have their pension and gratuity secured. **(Applause)** And so workers have to be aware of their situation and of what is in their best interest. Do you wish to continue pension less going to a parliamentary office begging, please put me on SEED, or do you want the independence and the certainty of knowing that you have something that you have invested in and that your Government has also contributed to?

So, Mr. Speaker, we believe that this is the right way to go. We believe that after having served the country for a number of years, in one's golden years, one ought not to be reduced to the status of a beggar or popper, but instead have the comfort and the security of knowing that you have something to look forward to at the end of every fortnight. The older we get, the more our needs increase. Health is a concern, the cost of food, the cost of medication, and even the cost of caregivers in some cases and

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therefore, I call upon my colleagues on “This Side” as well as those on the “Other Side” to give unreserved support to this Bill so that our people after having worked their years can retire with a level of dignity and material comfort which otherwise they would not have had access to. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Patrick West. I now see the light of MP for St. Andrew South West. I invite you to take the floor.

Hon. Lennox Andrew: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand in full support of this Bill. This Bill is filled with humanity. It's a humane Bill. This Bill is a Bill that is concerned about people. It is concerned with improving the welfare of people. It seeks to ensure that every Grenadian working within the public service has a better life. So this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is a Bill, in my opinion, really and truly we should not be debating. It's a Bill that really should be accepted because all of us are concerned about improving the lives of our people in this country.

Mr. Speaker, when we examine this Bill and what it intends to do and the manner in which it was framed, it really brought out the intelligence of this Government. But it also signals the depth and the strength of our desire to help improve the lives of people in this country. And given my training, Mr. Speaker, I believe that poverty is something that can be eliminated and it can be eradicated.

I read a piece written by professor William Darity of the University of North Carolina and how he explained that through savings, you can, in fact, acquire generational wealth, acquire generational wealth, acquire wealth which can now be passed on to those who come after, your children and grandchildren, you give them an early start. And so, in that way, you can break the strap, break the cycle of poverty that has faced us and affected us and affected black people in America.

So, Mr. Speaker, within our public service, we have two kinds of workers. We have the established workers who, being established when they retire, get a pension, and they get a gratuity. So they're good, they're good. The Bill is not for them. This Bill is for the

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4000 or so unestablished workers in the public service, who, when they retire, go straight into poverty because they have nothing to get. Could there be something more human than that? That's what this Bill seeks to do: address the 4000 unestablished workers in the public service who, on retiring, will get nothing and, therefore, are retiring into poverty. That can't continue. It's an inequality that exists in the system, and the Bill seeks to address that, change that inequality, and I'm saying that's human, that's humane in its nature, and it is also humane in its design.

Mr. Speaker, there are elements of this Bill that are extremely important. One is that public servants will contribute, will contribute to the improvement of their lives. So the Bill is contributory. That contribution, Mr. Speaker, don't watch that so. That contribution that public servants would make is a mindset. It's a mind-set. That contribution is saying that as a people, we have to do something to help ourselves. So that contribution is a savings. That is what it is. It's savings for down the road, for a better life down the road and when you save, savings has other meanings, Mr. Speaker.

So on one hand, what this Bill does is that it seeks to bring a mentality of savings within our people. Our people must have that mentality. As a people, we have to learn to save. We cannot be a consumption nation. We have to put aside some money. We have to learn to save because savings are the basis for investment, savings are the basis for development and savings are the basis for helping us to improve our lives. And I'll give an example. If you are a farmer and you have...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable MP, let me just interrupt you here. I've been hearing shrills of several devices and I urge Members in this Chamber and in the gallery to turn their devices off or put them on vibrate. The only thing that should be recorded on the Hansard should be the voice of the MPs on the floor. Thank you. Proceed, Honourable Member.

Hon. Lennox Andrew: Yes, so I am trying to... Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So if you are a farmer and harvest 10 corn, you harvest 10 corn, if you eat all the 10 corn, you

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will have no more corn to plant next year. But if you eat five corn or you eat eight corn and you put aside two corn to dry in the sun, that two corn you put aside is like capital; you can now plant these two corn and make more corn so you have more to eat. All right. And that is the simple implication of this saving. So this savings really means that we are putting aside some money for our improvement in life down the road, improving our lives down the road.

But also, Mr. Speaker, savings have a special characteristic about it. When we save, we make more money available in the society. The banks and commercial banks will have more money in their deposits. The credit unions are going to have more money in their deposits. Good? This means, therefore, they become more liquid and have more money in the departments. Good? This means, therefore, they become liquid, as the economist would say. If they become liquid and they have plenty of money, it means that they have a lot of money available for investment; interest rates are supposed to fall, and the cost of borrowing is supposed to fall. And therefore, more people would be encouraged to invest to use those savings to invest in other economic activities, yes, and create more economic activity in the country, so it means our country's GDP would increase, more income, more employment, and more output would be generated by our savings.

So, what this Bill is doing, Mr. Speaker, is that it is preparing our people's mind, preparing our people's minds to become a saving nation because it is through savings we now have resources available for investment which can lead to more income, more employment, more output and a higher living standard for our people and that's the microeconomic implication of that Bill. So in so doing, Mr. Speaker, at the end of it all, what you have is wealth creation, you have wealth being created, and with this wealth, you can now own a building, you can now own a piece of land, you own something, Mr. Speaker, so you have wealth being created from your savings. And it is that wealth, that piece of land, that house, that building you can now pass on to your children or your grandchildren, yes, and you could break that poverty trap that once affected you, so you're giving them a good start in life by having those savings there making it available to them,

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Mr. Speaker. That's the value, that's the value of this Bill. It could help transform our nation, not just the mind or people, but it could help build a stronger economy and a much stronger economy and ensure that our future generations can live a much better and much happier life.

Mr. Speaker, I also believe that this Bill is taking care of all these 4000 or so public servants who did not have a pension; what it does could help to build a much better public service, and it could help to improve the quality of the service that public servants provide. Now that you know as a public servant, now that you know as a public servant that you have something tangible available for you down the road, obviously, you feel more comfortable and you will feel more relaxed in your workplace and you will be prepared to give up your best and make the public service more efficient and more effective. So, in the end, what we're, in fact, doing is building a much better public service and making the public service far more, far more efficient than what it is now.

So, Mr. Speaker, in summary, I am saying that this Bill is a paradigm shift in the way in which we think and how we will do things. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, is creating the base for a society that is more equitable, a society where social justice exists, a society where as a nation we become more proud of ourselves, where we look to ourselves and we say to ourselves that as a people we can do something and we have to do something to better improve our lives because we are taking action through our saving, our individual savings which should the invisible hand, as Adam Smith says, will rebound to the benefit of all of our society.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have to support, we have to support this Bill. It will bring generation wealth. It will break the trap of poverty. It will create a new mindset for our people. It will bring to us an understanding that there is no social justice and there is no equality. As a people, we can be united and work together to transform our nation and to make others look at us and want to emulate and be proud of us, for what we are doing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

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Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, MP for St. Andrew South West. MP for the constituency of St. Mark.

Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as we are so close to Christmas, the 25th, I am not sure we will have any Sitting before then, so, I just want to start off with your permission in this season of cheer and good-will to just wish you, Mr. Speaker, and the staff and everyone who has served us here and all the Members of this Honourable House on “Both Sides” and everyone in the gallery as well and throughout our country, tri-island state, the very best, God's blessings and I wish them a very merry Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, while glancing through the Bill for the first time, I thought that there might be areas of concern to the members of the public, to the public servants, as I saw it and I had some questions in my mind which I couldn't answer and I had a brief discussion with my dear friend on the “Other Side”, the Leader of Government's Business asking whether, because it a huge document, 53, 54 pages there about, asking whether we could do first reading and come back subsequently to give time for consultations or whatever explanation on this Bill and he said he was not able to do so and I let it go, there wasn't any argument, I just let it go.

But, Mr. Speaker, on further scrutiny of the Bill, I have some concerns which I must voice, and I cannot leave here without doing so. To start off with, I am not aware that there has been serious engagement of the public as a whole so that they could know what it entails and what it is for them or with the persons who are directly involved or affected by the Bill, neither have I heard anything from the unions that say well they have been consulted and they understand. Mr. Speaker, this in no way is meant to take away from the fact that something needs to be done about the pension issue on the whole issue of the public servants. But, my concern here is that there have not been consultations that I know about, and I hope that I can be enlightened on it because perhaps there have been in some quarters, maybe it has been done too secretly, I don't know, but in asking other people, persons don't seem to be quite aware of it.

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So, Mr. Speaker, I do have some questions I would like to raise. I have not... And I have scrutinised the Bill pretty much in its entirety I don't know if I may have missed something, but I didn't see anything to tell us what really happens to contract workers except a specific group of contract workers, but contract workers in general. I didn't see anything that explained that or for persons who are in the category of the Imani.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of Government's Business, the Member for St. George South East, reminded us of some campaign promises long ago, and I wish to remind us all of some very recent campaign promises, which said that contract workers would be abolished because it is illegal to do so. I have not seen or heard anything happen in the two and a half years to abolish it and for us to become legally compliant.

Mr. Speaker, it was said in the campaign that all Imani's and contract workers will become permanent, I don't know that this Bill speaks to that or satisfies or takes them to that level that we abolish Imani's, that we've abolished contract workers and that everyone is on equal footing. So, my question is, has this Government blatantly reneged on its campaign promises to the people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique?

(Applause)

Mr. Speaker, in looking at the Bill, clause 6 of the Bill, subsection (2) speaks about persons who would-be members, the conditions for membership and that sort of thing. I called that section, "exclusion of public servants". I think it should have been named that way, and I want to explain why, Mr. Speaker. That subsection (2) says that, "A public sector Employee..." and I am quoting from the Bill, Mr. Speaker, "A public sector Employee who has been so employed for a period of three months or less, shall not be required to contribute for membership of the Scheme". That person is excluded is not involved. Mr. Speaker, I do not see where that leaves them. I am not clear on it and all of the learned ones on the "Other Side" I'm sure they'll have their time to explain to people like me.

Mention was made of NIS and the small amounts in the pension that NIS people got and the poverty and so on. So if someone who has worked, and I want to go back to it specifically, who has been employed for less than three months is not eligible. Then,

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aren't we relegating these same people to the NIS pension only, or how does the Fund save them?

Mr. Speaker, I have not seen or heard how the funds of the members would be protected or restored in the event of bankruptcy. I see all kinds of explanations about how the Trustees should be upright and upstanding and what have you, and if there's misappropriation of the fund how the Trustees will be dealt with, but if there is a faulty investment because the Bill says, well it speaks to the sources of fund, one will be contribution and the main thing would be the contribution or the savings that Members on the "Other Side" have alluded to and the other one is an investment. And in Grenada, we have experienced some very catastrophic investments where all funds have been lost. So then, what happens? This is my legitimate question: what happens in situations where there has been a bad investment, let's call it that, and so lots of money has been lost significant sums? What happens? How is the member protected in that end? I have not seen that explained in the Bill, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also speak of the actuarial valuation of the Fund. And the Bill says after two years, you have an actual evaluation, the first one, after two years of the implementation of such a fund and subsequently every five years. And, of course, the actuaries would give a report, and they would make recommendations, and based on that report and or recommendations then, the contributions of the members can either increase, go up, or it can decrease, it can go down. Now, if the contribution decreases and leaves the member at the same standing as it would have been, as he or she would have been originally, then there's no problem. If the recommendation is a significant increase that throws the members out of budgetary balance, I should say, then where does that put the balance? I appreciate that this is a saving for the future, but also, we have to look at what happens in the present situation. If there is an increase that is not manageable or affordable by the member, then what happens to that member? I think that is something that the Bill should speak to or some other wise person on the "Other Side" would tell us about it.

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Mr. Speaker, the Bill speaks about withdrawal from the retirement savings account and that the member can withdraw at least twice a year a minimum of \$2000. It says a minimum, but it doesn't give a maximum. And so my concern is if there isn't enough engagement of the members or the public servant, if there isn't enough, like, training in terms of how to manage the savings and if they take a minimum of \$2000 could be \$5000 could be \$15,000 because it doesn't give a limit here, then what happens to the savings, the so-called "savings" that we are speaking about and boasting about, where does that put that member, Mr. Speaker. So twice a year, a minimum of \$2000.

Mr. Speaker, I am just looking at some of the things that could put our members... Throw them off or put the very savings that they may want to do in jeopardy or put them in a present situation that puts them in a worse situation presently than they were before and I look at the rate of contribution in the Bill. The rate of contribution speaks to; it could, depending on your income, it could be 3%; depending on your income, it could be 6%, but it also speaks about voluntary contributions, 10% voluntary contributions.

Who are the people that would form that group or that cohort of persons from which voluntary contributions would come? How would 10% from their periodic earnings, whether it's bi-monthly, whether it's monthly or whatever, how will taking 10% affect them? Has that been looked at? Has that been discussed with the people; their concerns for their daily lives as well as for the future? We cannot ignore the present. The cost of living is going up, and we must remember that NIS dues have already increased.

My dear colleague from St. Patrick West mentioned the demands on money. I'm not quoting him, but he mentioned some areas where the demands on a person's revenue could be even greater. He mentioned healthcare, and we know the situation with healthcare presently, and at certain times persons are required to dig deep into their pockets to take care of their healthcare.

Then, if we say 10% and if we say that that 10% could go up to 15%, if the actuaries say that we need to step up, what happens to the members presently? Has that been discussed with them? Have they been engaged enough? Have the Union been

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engaged? If they have been engaged, engaged the workers these are some of my concerns.

So, I am not saying... I have nothing against bringing a Bill to help persons to save and help persons to have a better retirement life. My concern is the people who are excluded from the Bill are not addressed in any way, and the Bill is silent on how they will be taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, so the manner in which this Bill came, as though it is a rush, I don't know, the Government probably sees things that we do not see. It is not the norm for all Bills to be taken through all stages. As a matter of fact, there are some Bills, especially when they affect people's lives, that these Bills are taken through the first stage, consultations, explanation, and education are done, but this one, there seems to be an almighty rush, and sooner or later we will find out why.

I just want to say to this Government, to the Members on the "Other Side", and to the Leader of Government's Business who has proposed this Bill, that they relook at it, revisit the manner in which it is done, consult with people, consult with your unions and so the better life you're making, starts with respect for people and inclusion of people when decisions are being made with them. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. Mark. I now invite the MP for St. Patrick East to now take the floor.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And good morning to every Member of Parliament present here today. I must start by saying because we are in the yuletide season, I want to wish every Member, as well as every citizen of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, a very productive and prosperous rest of 2024. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would try to give some background on where we are, where we came from and where we intend to go with this Bill.

You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that as we speak currently, there are two types of public servants. We have established public servants, which is about 4,000 plus that

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benefit under the 1958 Pension Act. In fact, as recently as 2022, the Government would have paid in excess of 500 persons their pensions, who would have left the public service without a pension in their hand. In fact, they would have been reverted to poverty because they were not paid a pension. So, the Government of Grenada would have paid in excess of \$75.1m to those types of workers. **(Applause)**

The Member on the "Other Side" who just spoke, the Parliamentary Representative for St. Mark said that she does not see in the Bill where we cater for the Imani's, the contract workers and all those things. The unestablished workers include all those persons, the Imani's, those for contracts to service and all the other types of contracts that exist in the service.

Now let me say that, as we speak, these persons were not entitled to any pension under the 1958 Pension Act. And so, they would have been retiring sometime down the road without a pension. So this is the purpose of this particular Bill, to make sure at the end of their years of service these persons can benefit from a pension also. **(Applause)** Although the pension is going to be a contributory type of pension where the employee is required to pay 3% of their salary to the pension fund, the Government is also required to do that. And so, at the end of their work life, they would be entitled to a pension to take home at the end of the day.

Again, people have to understand this thing in context. We have a lot of problems in our country whereby we have to basically provide for the people who are underprivileged, and it keeps growing and growing. This Pension Bill will stem the tide of that, because some persons would have gone home to poverty and come back to the same Government for SEED and for housing, and for other activities and so on.

We are saying that we are putting you in the driver's seat to save some money while you are working, and at the end of the day, you can benefit from something. Yes, the NIS pension may be small, but if you top that up with this pension, I am going to guarantee you that you will have a better day down the road. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker, there is an element in the Bill which talks about the past service cost. There are currently many workers on contract or in the temporary or unestablished sector

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that right now, they don't have a solution to the problem where, what happens to my years of service? This Pension Bill has taken on board the past service cost of those persons and would contribute that to the pension plan so that at the end of the day, those persons would not lose their years of service of work benefit. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker, I also want to speak to something called the vesting of the beneficiaries in this pension plan. Now the vesting period takes a five-year period. In year one, you may not be benefiting from anything. Sorry, year zero, nothing. In year one, you would benefit from 25% of the Government fund that it has placed in the Fund for you. In year two, you benefit from 50%. In year three, you benefit from 75%. And by the end of year five, you would have 100% benefit in that fund as your defined contribution that the Government made.

After that, you would be someone who is vested in the fund, so you cannot lose your money, and you cannot be denied your money at the end of the day. So I want to make that very clear. This pension plan, as far as I'm concerned, because I was part of a defined contribution plan before in my lifetime and in a normal company's operation, they tell you five years before you can be vested in their fund. This one allows you to be from year one in the Fund. And so, I think this Fund, they're going to be a very, very beneficial thing to the employees of the Government of Grenada, as well as to make sure that the very concessionary terms of this Fund will make the worker a better person down the road.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about the issue of consultation with the unions regarding this pension plan. Now it is said outside there that the Government of Grenada did not consult. One of the reasons why we basically are coming to the House at this late stage, maybe about a year later from presenting this Bill, is because we've had extensive consultation throughout. **(Applause)**

Now, the public service union has not come on board from the inception because we did invite them to come on board and be part of this process. They have not come on board, and you would hear them talking nonsense out there about they were not consulted. I wonder how much more invitations and consultations they would need to be

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part of it. We still leave it open so that they can call now if they want and be part of the process. But if they don't come on board and so on, they should shut their mouth up.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, we're talking about mandatory contributions to the Fund. And that is allowing our public servants who are beneficiaries of this plan to be able to save some monies. And I know my colleagues have mentioned the benefit of saving your money right now. Right? And so, for those who still doubt that this is going to be to the benefit of all our workers down the road, I say to them, think again.

The element of voluntary contribution... As it said, voluntary. You have a mandatory obligation to pay your 3% and the Government pays 3%. If it's 6%, the Government pays the 6%. But if you so wish to add to your savings any amount, again, it must be approved by the Board of Trustees and so on, and they say it could go up to a maximum of 10%. You are not obligated to do it, but if you do it, it would be in your interest. And therefore, I see no difficulty in saying that it's all intended to benefit the worker down the road.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the issue of whether or not the investment in which those funds are going to be placed, whether or not it's going to be a secure funding. As with many other pension funds, the aim is to make sure you would invest in risk, less risky investments, so at the end of the day, you can benefit from a small savings on it. You're not asking the Board of Trustees to invest in risky business that could cause the funds to be lost, as in things like the GSL or the CapBank or those kinds of things. So this is a safeguard that we guarantee down the road that you would have savings, plus you would get benefits from your savings on an annual basis.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wish to basically support this Bill wholeheartedly, because it's in the interest of all the workers who currently are at risk. And so, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make sure that this Bill gets the support here today. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. Patrick East. The Honourable Prime Minister.

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Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: 15 minutes.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, might I ask for your indulgence to permit me an additional 15 minutes? I say so, Mr. Speaker, on the basis that I'm the line minister for the Department of Public Administration, and it is largely the work of the Department of Public Administration together with the Pension Reform Committee that we are here today. So I think it's important that I crave your indulgence to be given some additional time, so that I can speak to the process, as well as the context and the reason and importance of this Bill, Mr. Speaker. Because the Leader of Government Business, I don't think it was speaking or exaggerating when he talked about the significant importance and the history of this Bill, as it relates to addressing workers who have been treated unfairly and this Government's...

Mr. Speaker: It's a request to me?

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot grant you an additional 15 minutes. I cannot. I will grant you an additional five minutes.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: I am in your hands, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: All right.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, first, I want to start off by actually commending Permanent Secretary Mrs. Lyndonna Hillaire-Marshall, who heads the

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Department of Public Administration and her team, for the enormous amount of work that they've done in getting us to this point today. I want to go on record and I certainly will ask Members of the House to recognise her. **(Applause)**

I also want to thank Dr. Curlan Gilchrist, who led the Pension Reform Committee and the members of the committee, for, again, the enormous work done to get us to this point where we have a Pension Reform Bill before us. And I want to thank Mr. Derek Osborne, the consultant who was retained by the Pension Reform Committee, to get us to this point.

And I wish to emphasise what the Minister for Finance has said, by indicating, in fact, Mr. Speaker, that we were aiming to have this Bill in Parliament as early as December last year or January of this year, and in fact, we pushed it back numerous times to facilitate the consultations within Government, within statutory bodies and with other stakeholders. And so, we are satisfied, Mr. Speaker, that this is no rush process. This is a process, if you ask me, took too long. And it is not just about the two and a half years of this Administration. We have to understand the context, and I will go, Mr. Speaker, to why we are here. And I'll seek to address a lot of the whys.

Mr. Speaker, if we peruse the law books and the legislation passed in this House, under the Pension Acts, you see, there are certain Pension Acts you would see. The first one is the Pension Disqualification Act. That's the first one, that one the court ruled in 2022 was unconstitutional and breached the rights of established public servants to be paid their pensions based on the 1958 Pension Act. And this Act relates to prison officers, police, teachers, etcetera. The court ruled it was unconstitutional.

Mr. Speaker, in 1983 the National Insurance Scheme was introduced. Presumably, the thinking then by the PRG Government was that by introducing a National Insurance Scheme which sought to create pensions for all Grenadian workers, they could do away with the 1958 Pension Legislation, which came about or was reinforced by the Constitution. We have to understand that in 1983, under the PRG Government, there was no Constitution. The Constitution was suspended. So when they were passing laws,

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they were passing laws that had to be tested by whether or not they complied with the Constitution.

So when the NIS Act was passed, and if the intent was to repeal the 1958 Act, they didn't have to worry about any Constitution. They didn't have to worry about someone challenging it and going to court, and the court ruling it was unconstitutional. But the Constitution was restored in the 90s, and it meant all legislation, including legislation passed by the PRG Government, had to be tested in conformity with the Constitution. **(Applause)** And the unions, for several decades, complained and challenged, and finally, they got their victory in 2022 when that Act was deemed to be unconstitutional. It said that established workers, workers who are entitled under these respective Acts, were entitled to their pensions.

What did I say then, as an ordinary member of the public, leading a party that had no seat in Parliament? We said we would pay the pension. And if you take the National Democratic Congress Manifesto, point one on that manifesto was a simple line, we will pay the pension. **(Applause)** And as the Minister for Finance said, we paid the retroactive pension, \$75m plus dollars. **(Applause)**

What did the then Prime Minister say? He corralled the public to come down to the Trade Centre. **(Laughter)** Doom and gloom. All kinds of machinations. **(Laughter)** Thunderstorms and lightning, if you pay the people their pension. But you see, fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. You see, the same kind of gallery was made in 2018, and some people fell for it, so one side had all 15 seats in Parliament. But a new day was dawned. A day when people actually do the things they say they will do. **(Applause)** So, Mr. Speaker, we paid the pensions.

We have emphasised that for established public officers, who are entitled to their pensions under the respective legislations, we will continue, as long as this Administration is in office, to honour it and to pay it. So let me emphasise that this Bill reinforces that the pensions guaranteed to establish public officers, under the Constitution and under the respective 1958 pieces of legislation, remain in force. Because we go further in this Act.

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You see, some of us don't like to read. Read down to the end of the Act, and you will see that the Act repeals the Pension Disqualification Act. **(Applause)**

So I want the established officers to understand, we are not interfering with their rights. And I will go and record to say it was extremely disappointing that when we invited the Trades Union Council to nominate a representative to serve on the Pension Reform Committee, they refused to do so. They refused to be part of the process of shaping a Bill for other workers who do not have a pension... **(Inaudible comments by Members)** for other workers who do not have a pension. And this Bill has ramifications for even people who work for unions because they know, and we know, that many of the workers of the unions themselves do not benefit from a pension plan.

So an opportunity is presented to people who should be representing workers. Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 4,500 Government employees who do not have any entitlement to a pension as we speak. Let me repeat that. There are approximately 4,500 Government of Grenada employees, employed under all kinds of modes, largely by an NNP Administration, who do not have any entitlement to a pension. How did that come about?

The NNP Administration undertook a structural adjustment programme in 2013. Most of the unproductive borrowing was done by an NNP Administration that built a set of concrete that they didn't ensure, and when the hurricane hit us in 2004, it put the country's fiscal and economic circumstances in a challenging situation. And so, we borrowed our way to attempt to recover. By 2030, **(Inaudible comments by Members)** Mr. Speaker, 0.70 cents of every dollar... It's okay, Mr. Speaker... 0.70 cents of every dollar was spent on salaries for the public service and the other 0.30 cents on debt payments. So it meant the Government had no money. It was bankrupted, and it would be a matter of time before it couldn't even pay the same workers.

There are other countries in the region that have gone through this. Barbados faced the same issue under Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford. Back in the 1980s, under Herbert Blaize, the Government faced the same situation. That is what led to the formation of the National Democratic Congress because the then-Member, who is now

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the Opposition Leader and others supported a policy that would have retrenched and fired Government workers and the like. Let me repeat that. They supported a policy that would have retrenched and fired Government workers. It tells you, they have always been anti-workers. **(Applause)**

That is what led to the formation of the National Democratic Congress. George Brizan, Dr Francis Alexis and others said no, it can't be that every time the country runs into economic challenges, the first people that have to take the brunt are the workers. And that is what led to the formation of the National Democratic Congress.

So when we talk about an Administration that is pro-workers, this is not some fly-by-night something that happens. That has always been in the DNA of the National Democratic Congress. **(Applause)** And you can look at all of the things that have happened in the last two and a half years in relation to protecting and promoting the progress of the working class throughout Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)** So, Mr. Speaker, this is simply a continuation of this.

So this Bill, hence the reason it is called Pension Reform, seeks to do a number of things. One, provide a pension or retirement savings for public officers who currently do not have any entitlement to a pension—all public officers who do not have any entitlement to a pension, except for the listed exceptions here. One. People who are temporary.

If someone is on sick leave and someone is called in just to hold on for the period when you're on sick leave, clearly, you can't be entitled to a pension. If you just started work and you're on probation, obviously, during the probation period, you'd not be entitled to a pension. I wouldn't have thought that I would actually have to come here and explain that in the House of Parliament. **(Applause)**

And, Mr. Speaker, there is a category of workers; if you're 50 years and older, and if you have been in the service for 15 years or more, there is, currently, a gratuity in place for them, and therefore, they do not qualify for this pension. That's the three categories, Mr. Speaker.

The Bill goes further to allow statutory bodies, who either do not have a pension, do not have an adequate pension or who recognise the advantage of pooling of resources

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because that's what pensions are about, to also join this pension scheme. And, Mr. Speaker, I just, for the record, want you to permit me to point out that there are several statutory bodies, government departments, etcetera where there are, in fact, absolutely no pensions in place right now. Let me just make reference to some of these: the Child Protection Authority; the Financial Complex; the Grenada Cultural Foundation; the Grenada Food and Nutrition Council; the Grenada Postal Corporation; the Grenada Tourism Authority; the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, the CBI Committee; the National Training Agency; the Planning and Development Authority. The workers there do not have any pension. None. They are working for the public. They're all working in one way, shape or form to serve the public, and they don't have.

So, Mr. Speaker, this pension is designed to allow statutory bodies to come on board. And eventually, Mr. Speaker, we envisage that it will allow private sector employers and employees to be part of this process once they are prepared to have a defined contributory scheme and to abide by the rules of the pension.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be honest. We have to understand. When we talk about regularisation, I heard the Member for St. Mark talking about promises made and not kept, you see, you may want to think people are simple or simplistic or that they're stupid. Grenadians are not stupid. Let's be real.

For 40 years public servants didn't get a pension, you know. They were not paid a pension. The Constitution said they were entitled to one. You have laws and legislation that say you're entitled to one, and you're still going home, and the Government is not paying. And you're fighting in court. And had it not been for the election, and I'm saying it here, had it not been for the election, we know, the then NNP Administration was going to appeal that judgement. **(Applause)** And they could say otherwise because they defended the case in court. They had the option, before the High Court Judge, you say, judge, look, we are not arguing here. We accept the logic of the arguments. We accept these people are entitled to their pensions. We will sit and negotiate with them. They didn't do that. They defended the case.

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And because... **(Inaudible comment by Members)** Well, you can go ask your lawyers or the Attorney General then. Right? You didn't concede the case. You didn't agree. You defended the case. You lost. And... **(Inaudible comment by Members)** ...elections were coming, so you knew if you went and told all these public servants, 4,000 who are currently working the five, six hundred who would have sent into poverty that you're not paying, you know what the consequences are. So you try the other tactic of saying doom and gloom, and it will wreck the economy if you pay. But as I said, fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me.

So, Mr. Speaker, the reality is simple. If we do not ensure that we have a sustainable pension system in place, the same thing will happen. The same thing will happen; whoever is in Government 10 years or 15 years from now. If we face a situation where you simply move the IMANI's, the contract workers, the unestablished workers, and you say, become established officers, where you have an unfunded, non-contributory pension, it is not sustainable. And what happens in those situations when a government faces that? We'll have choices. Do we pay the workers who are actually working, or do we pay pensioners? They will not pay the pensioners because the pensioners can't strike; they can't withhold their services. And that's what happened for the 40 years, you know.

Successive Governments made a deliberate decision to say, with limited resources, are we going to pay the pension, or are we going to pay the workers who are currently working? And when things got tight, they didn't just not pay pensioners; they then had an attrition policy that said, for every 10 workers we lose, we are only hiring three. That is part of what has led to the challenges in public service. But that was the policy decision that they made then.

Not only did they do that, first we said for every 10 that goes, but we're also only hiring three, they then said, we are only going to hire you in circumstances that guarantee you do not have any entitlement to pension, that guarantee you do not have job security, that guarantee is one year contract, and then we roll it over to another year, and then we roll it over to another year. And then you can't even go to a credit union, you can't even go to a bank.

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And they recognise that, because just before the election, they gave GDB \$10m and said give those contract workers and so on who can't get loans from the banks, give them loans, because we put them in a position where we know, as soon as they go they will say to them, well you only have a one year contract so we can't deal with it.

So what does this Pension Bill do? It puts us in a position, Mr. Speaker, where we enter into 2025, and there is a regularisation framework. And that's why I say people are not stupid or simple. There is a regularisation framework. The public servants know what that framework is over 300 of them who are in acting positions were confirmed. **(Applause)** Well, Mr. Speaker, when you're acting, you're straddling two positions. You have your substantive position, and then you act in one. So the person beneath who needs to move up can't move up because you are straddling both. So when we confirm those who move up to a higher acting position, it frees up the post for those who are beneath to come up.

When this process is finished, we then have the two thousand, three thousand plus people who are either on the contract of, for, in between, up, down; we then put them in a position, Mr. Speaker, to start eliminating the discrepancies between them and established officers. And the single biggest discrepancy is, one, the lack of a pension. The second one, would be the lack of job security and tenure. And we will be addressing that in 2025... **(Applause)** ...so the reference to these fixed terms one-year contracts is eliminated.

So, on the one hand, you're saying immediately, and then you come here and rush and say, well, why are we rushing the Pension Bill? **(Laughter)** So, we appreciate you don't want us to do anything for the workers. **(Applause) (Laughter)** We understand what this is about. Right? And so to you, it's rushing, but it is 40 years of waiting. It is 40 years of waiting. So, Mr. Speaker, we don't intend to wait. Right?

And I will conclude, I will conclude because I think this is important for the beneficiaries of this. All of those who're talking on the "Other Side" had the opportunity to do the very things we are doing here today. **(Applause)** Instead, they hired you on a one-year contract. They hired you as Imani, making you work, masquerading as training.

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They refuse to pay the pensions for the established workers. They have never addressed the minimum wage in their entire existence **(applause)** as a political organisation. They've existed for 40 years. They have never sought to address the Minimum Wage Order in the entire 40 years.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will quote the mantra that I think has guided this process, and I will thank the permanent secretary for the wise quote. I don't know who the author of it is. And it says, "The secret to change is focus, not on fighting the old, but on building the new". **(Applause)** We are not fighting the established officers who have their constitutionally guaranteed pensions. That is yours. If you are established officers as of today's date, it is yours; it is constitutionally guaranteed. We've paid it in the past. We'll continue to pay it.

We are asking you to remember your fellow brothers **(time bell rings)** and sisters who are working with you, and who sit side by side with you, who do not have a pension and support them in this initiative so that they can have a pension and have a future when they exit work, they have the opportunity to go and live in dignity, knowing that they have a country that has respected them for the work that they've put in and serving the citizens of Grenada. I'm grateful, Mr. Speaker, for the extra five minutes that was afforded. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. And I now invite the Honourable Leader of His Majesty's Opposition to take the floor.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, of course, I sat here, and I hope my watch is not incorrect. I hope it's understood that the Opposition Leader requires the same time to respond to what was just said, in many cases, not true statements.

Mr. Speaker, let me make this point. Some people would talk about 1983 and 1984 because they might have read it in a book or somebody told them a secondary story. I was there! I was there! So I speak the truth from the facts. Not some storytelling, that I heard a short while ago, Mr. Speaker, not storytelling.

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Mr. Speaker, I heard some contradictory statements about pensions. The Leader of Government's Business said that NNP never delivered on pensions. **(Laughter)** The Minister for Finance said that a certain amount of money was paid on pension in 2022. The Prime Minister, in a legalistic way, said that... **(Laughter)** He didn't say "pension". "Retroactive." So he was very legally on the right track. So he wasn't contradictory as the other two were, but that is the gymnastics that you see.

Mr. Speaker, I hear that this Bill is history-making. **(Laughter)** History-making. It doesn't talk about the 2,200 workers whose pension was being paid, even before the Glasgow arrangement, the Glasgow decision. And, in fact, Mr. Speaker, there is a section that is now being proposed in the Bill that talks about repayment for overpayments. **(Laughter)** Where were the overpayments made, and when? You're not hearing about that. Why was there an overpayment? Because there was a rush to play games with the public's purse for political purposes when this Government was elected.

There was a... because monies were paid to people, and because the data was not researched appropriately, people received monies, more than what was required. So they're now talking about these people must repay those monies, Mr. Speaker, but you're not hearing anything from those who have listened to stories and talking about George Brizan and so on. They're not talking about that. I was there. I was there, and I challenged the then-minister.

And it is false, Mr. Speaker, to say the formation of the National Democratic Congress was because of these wages and pensions of workers. This is nonsense. It was far from the truth. It was far from the truth. The history and the data will show there were other issues that were involved. And at the right time... In fact, I'll use a special piece to explain because I'm the one who was there and is still here. So I could speak to it from facts, not what I read in a book or somebody told me. Some of us were just five and six years old at the time. I was there. Talk about George Brizan. I recall when I spent about two days literally tearing apart the Minister for Finance's presentation that had the whole country on edge, Mr. Speaker. And that's not a boast.

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But, Mr. Speaker, I heard the statement, “How come some public servants... **(Laughter)** You know... “How they were so unhappy, and how they used to be overjoyed”... “They should be so overjoyed now”. The stories are there; if the workers of the public service chose the leadership, and the leadership is having problems with the actions of a Government that affects the workers, you’re telling me you want to dismiss that? We don’t necessarily agree, as we did with the union representation on the issue, but we never refused to file any major agreements without ensuring that we had some level of consultation. Even when, and in fact it is well known that the union leadership played a major part in this Government being in office. That’s a fact that cannot be denied.

And talking about fool me once, fool me twice. They fooled me five times and six times. Is that what it said? We fooled the Government and the people of the country, five times and six times. Only a young mind that was not there and was maybe asleep in ‘83 and ‘84 will talk that language. But I wasn’t asleep; I was right here in this House. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, I was right here. Fool me once, fool me twice and then fool me again. You are yet to know whether you’re fooling the people or not. The time will come. Sooner than later, it will come. I passed through it five times. We passed through it six times. So don’t talk yet, Mr. Speaker. Don’t talk yet, Mr. Speaker, through you, Mr. Speaker. When you pass that stage, and then they give you a dose of re-endorsement, then you have a right to speak. But you cannot speak like that now! I can speak, Mr. Speaker! **(Laughter/Applause)**

I just hope you guys stop the little children stuff on the “Other Side”, through you, Mr. Speaker, because I kept my cool, even when some things were being said that were not true. I did not disturb anybody, so I expect the same thing in return.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, I move now to address some of the issues on this Public Sector (Pension Fund) Bill. It is very interesting, Mr. Speaker, that we are hereby seeking to discuss a Bill to advance pension reform. **(Laughter)** This word should make Members on the “Other Side” choke when they use the word “pension reform” simply because this word was never used in the campaign. It was, we will pay the pension, and we will pay it. If...

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You know. You know. Please, Mr. Speaker. Please, Mr. Speaker. You know the sad thing is one Member said that the pension is being paid, another one said that it was not being paid, and another one said we paid retroactive payments. I don't know which one of those Members in the House wants to be consistent on; maybe they should talk to each other. I don't know if they talk to each other because they have a king. We don't have kings, Mr. Speaker. **(Laughter)** They have a king. So... So... But you know, there are some kings who one day will find out they're no longer kings. **(Laughter)** Five times. Six times, Mr. Speaker.

(Inaudible comment by Members)

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: You know, it's...

Mr. Speaker: All right.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: clear that I'm touching...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: something...

Mr. Speaker: Just hold.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Just hold.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: ... it's clear I'm touching some...

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Mr. Speaker: Just ...

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: ... some corns.

Mr. Speaker: ... just hold Honourable...

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: ... because I didn't get those chatters when I was, when I was on "This Side".

Mr. Speaker: That's why I asked you to hold.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Yes. Okay.

Mr. Speaker: Right.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please.

Mr. Speaker: While I understand the emotions from my right, I want to be able to hear the Honourable MP without too much interference.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I'm not saying that you shouldn't speak, but I want to be able to hear him clearly as he presents. Proceed, Honourable.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: (Laughter) Mr. Speaker, I know how difficult it is for Members to sit down and listen to the truth, so it's hard for them, but you put yourself in that position, not me.

Mr. Speaker, so, no discussion about pension reform. And we in Government, the New National Party's Government, ensured that if we, because we understand numbers,

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we understand numbers, if we have to go back to '58 pensions, the facts are with all the non-payments and were not done, and with a countries resources limited, it means that we will not be able to meet fundamental responsibility in several areas. We were being honest. So when someone comes around and says just vote for me, I'll pay the pension and talking about the same people that did what they did today are being accused of not wanting to cooperate. Well, that's their... they have to deal with this, Mr. Speaker. But that's the problem that I find with this Government.

Mr. Speaker, so they touted and paid 525 persons retroactive payments and we don't have a problem that they did this. But they also said they promised in less than three years of governance, they've made that payment, and now we are talking about public sector pension reform. **(Laughter)** That word was never used before. And this is very significant for the workers.

Now, I do not necessarily agree with them, but if you say something and you say you're going to do it, and you're going to do it by the stroke of a pen; it would be done. "Stroke of a pen." What happened? The pen had a stroke? **(Laughter)** I hope the pen didn't have a stroke. But that's the kind of game. And people come and stand in here posturing, posturing... As if, you know, some of them, just what they read or somebody told them second-hand stories. That was read. I didn't read anything. I lived it.

So, a memorandum of understanding, Mr. Speaker, was developed in 2018, and there were several persons involved in that discussion. And it came up, with discussions with the unions and we said we engaged them in deeper conversations. Mr. Speaker, talks broke down, because the union leadership did not agree that we should look at pension reform because I was pointing out the problem. That's a fact. We're not here to play games. We did not agree, so that is where we were. But promises were made, Mr. Speaker, and therefore we saw what happened eventually and hear what's happening now. It's sad today that some of the workers, Mr. Speaker, the same workers who marched through the streets then, for the 1958 pension to be affordable, retroactively and otherwise, some of the same people today, Mr. Speaker, are being told that they're doing

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something wrong. Some of the same people were promised; they conversed. And that is the problem, Mr. Speaker.

So, however, Mr. Speaker, the issue is you could sit down with the workers, but it appears there is a dictatorial approach in conversation with the social partners, Mr. Speaker. The fact is, in Government, under the New National Party's Government, Mr. Speaker, we brought social partners together. We had the churches, the non-governmental community, the business community, the "Government Side", and the trade union movement meeting monthly, Mr. Speaker, monthly, discussing issues, and we listened to them; not always agreeing, but listened.

But I don't hear anything. If the union is telling lies, well they're telling lies. They told us they were not consulted, and I repeat that here today. They told us, but I'm hearing from the "Government Side" that they were consulted or they attempted to consult them. I don't know who is telling the truth. But I could only say what was told to me, and I could only repeat what I heard in this Honourable House here. So, Mr. Speaker, this is quite a problem as far as I'm concerned.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, I wanted to be clear. The Members on the "Other Side" must appreciate that this matter has far-reaching implications for the current and future workers of this country in the public service. The Government, Mr. Speaker, stood on platforms over and over, and even on their Heartbeat Programme, Mr. Speaker, claiming that contract work is illegal. And it's a lawyer speaking, you know. A lawyer. A lawyer speaking; not a liar. A lawyer speaking... Contract work was illegal, and all of a sudden, it became legal. Is it legal gymnastics again?

Some of us are not legal experts, but we understand certain things. But is there no apology? No apology forthcoming for saying that it is illegal, and now it's now legal, and it's legal all over the world, whether it's Canada, United States, Barbados, Trinidad or anywhere, it's legal? In Grenada, a certain lawyer says it's illegal, and now it's legal. This is the kind of gymnastics that is being played with the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, given the view then, how is it that section 3, subsection (b) of this Bill excludes workers above 50 years of age and who exceed 15 years of continued service?

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How does it exclude them from any benefits? Has there been any agreement with the workers that that is okay? That's a question. Are these same workers spoken of on the campaign trail? What will be the pension entitlement to these persons who are excluded? With almost three years in Government, Mr. Speaker, if you want to say two and a half going to three, the question is, what is their position? What is their position? We're not hearing. And people are knocking on the desk. Do you believe knocking on the desk could solve the problems of this Pension Bill? And everybody jumping, knocking the table as if your hand will break, and if it's something wrong. Yes. That will not solve this. It would not solve it. It is what is happening to the workers when they get up and speak.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable...

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: And the time will come. Madam Deputy Speake, the time...

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): Honourable Member.

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

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): You may proceed.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: All right. **(Laughter)** Madam Deputy Speaker, what happens with the permanency of jobs? "We just make everybody permanent; just make them permanent". What happened? A stroke of the pen again? It got a stroke again. It did. It got a stroke. Smart men. Smart men. Some lawyers. Smart men.

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Are they now entitled; the same workers who are now being left out? Are they not entitled to have the 1958 assessment for pension? They're not. They're not even getting one. Most were entitled to anything before that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Pension Fund will be governed by a board. **(Time Bell rings)** Madam Deputy Speaker, I saw 23 minutes of the former presenter. So, I expect to get... There's equal time in this Parliament for presentation. Okay? You want me to end now? You all want to end now? Because the heat getting hotter. **(Laughter)** Yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member...

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: ... for St. George North West.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: According to the count of the, the Clerk, the Prime Minister, and Member for St. David spoke for 20 minutes and a few seconds. And by this clock, you have spoken for 20 minutes.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: 20 minutes already?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): Yes.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: **(Laughter/Applause)** Well, wait, wait, wait, wait.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): So...

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Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a feeling that clock had a stroke.

(Laughter/Applause)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): Honour...

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: That clock had a stroke, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): Honourable Member...

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: So I, I was checking, but...

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): I do take your point, so I will give you one minute to wrap up. Thank you.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm sorry you're not running the chair. **(Laughter)** Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a lot more to say. So I want to have a ... In any event, there are social media platforms because I have a lot more, a lot more material.

So I just want to conclude here to say this. This issue of pension is a serious matter, and it's something that requires, I would have assumed, both Government and Opposition working together. But we never get no, no, no **(laughter)** initiative on the part of this Government to be part of anything, to be part of anything. So I understand what's taking place. So I just want to say this. The workers, the union, and both leaders need to do something appropriately to ensure that some of the promises that were made to them have, in fact, been kept because they are not being kept.

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So, on that note, Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to say this. It's a tough time of the year to bring a Bill of this nature, with the Xmas season on and people's businesses being concentrated a lot in respect to the Christmas season. I thought it was an unfortunate time that such a Bill would have been brought.

But I do, I want to take this opportunity though to wish everyone the best Christmas you can have in this very difficult time. Because I heard it being said about having a prosperous Christmas. I don't know how many... Maybe for Members and the "Other Side" because it's 6,000 plus salary increase would have done them well. But I don't know if most workers will have a prosperous time, Madam Deputy Speaker.

But I take this opportunity to wish you the best that you can have this time, and hopefully, 2025 can be a better year than 2024, and 2023 have been. And to say that because of what was done previously, the Government itself announced, the last point I'm making, that they had over \$500m in cash savings while workers were receiving, 6,000 plus workers were receiving work during the Christmas season. I wish on that note to say thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the extra couple minutes to make this point. Thank you. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen): Member of Saint George North East.

Hon. Ron Redhead: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this very important Bill.

Sergeant-at-Arms: His Honour, the Speaker, in the Chair.

Hon. Ron Redhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this very important Bill. Now I rise in full support of this Bill as presented by Leader of Government's Business, Honourable Philip Telesford and Member for St. George South East, and to say, Mr. Speaker, that after listening to the outgoing Leader of His Majesty's

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Opposition, I get the sense that it was a lot of majoring in minors. Because the fundamental question that he, through you, should be answering today, is why he didn't do anything about pension reform. **(Applause)** Dodging.

So, Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to provide an opportunity for the unestablished public servants in the service to have a pension as an immediate benefit of its passing and for the established public servant, as you heard so eloquently by Honourable Prime Minister and Other Members, whose pension is already guaranteed by the Constitution, to have the option to switch to the new plan. So it is flexible like that.

So for the established worker, your constitutional pension and I want to reiterate that, is not going away, but the option is there to transition if you feel to. That is why the essence of this Bill before us here today is not to take away anything, but it is to capture and provide adequate for the mass number of workers on contract who do not have a pension when they go home and who are retiring into poverty, that inequitable distribution of the wealth for the retired, unestablished public officer is the dilemma we seek to solve. That is what this Bill is doing.

So, Mr. Speaker, as written in the Bill, it establishes a contributory pension scheme for public sector employees, 3% from the worker and 3% from the employer if you earn \$5,000 and under. But let us say that you are earning above \$5,000; you will then be required to contribute 6% on the extra that you are earning above \$5,000. And the Government will also match that extra by providing the very same 6% beyond the \$5,000. So beyond the \$5,000, you'll pay 6%; if you work for \$5,000 and under, you will pay 3%, and it is matched in both scenarios by the Government of Grenada.

So, while this seeks to solve the dilemma for the unestablished worker, in principle, the new plan, Mr. Speaker, is also seeking to solve the dilemma for the Government of Grenada as well. As mentioned by the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Member for St. David, prior to the Structural Adjustment Programme, Grenada was spending about \$0.70 cents of every dollar to pay wages and pension for a non-contributory pension scheme. That, Mr. Speaker, was economically unsustainable. So

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the need to ensure the sustainability of the pension plan is why we must reform it, not later, but now. The then Administration, Mr. Speaker, they introduce the attrition policy.

I listened to the Member of St. Mark, in her usual style, just to put out the doubts there, trying to confuse the population about consultation and consultation. When they decimated the public service, did they consult with anybody about the attrition policy? Three for ten. Right? So, for every ten established employees who retired from the public service, only three could have been hired. What that did, Mr. Speaker, was to reduce the quality of the public service; it destroyed it. So we don't hear the claims and calls for a consultation about that then, but you're hearing it now when this Bill is seeking actually to improve, not to take away anything from anybody. So that was the destruction of the public service, so that's why we have to come here now.

And the answer or rather the intention... I listened to the outgoing Leader of His Majesty's Opposition. He gave the impression as if... So I just want to make this point. Because you had social partners, he claimed he had a better relationship with the workers; he claimed he had this, he had that going for you, you did this, you were pro-this, you were pro-that, but you still could not come with a recommendation to the Grenadian people on the question of pension reform?

And when you had the opportunity, what did you do? You went down to the Trade Centre, you made a big carnival, and then you came to talk about "smart men" and "nice talk". Who was the smart man then? And we have to be serious, Mr. Speaker, because this issue of pension reform runs deep. One of the things that we desperately need to resolve in this is how we give the Grenadian men and women in the public service a higher quality of life post-retirement.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency, I can't speak for others, but I'm sure there are similarities. Every issue that comes to me labour-related, I often reach out to the unions, I often reach out to the Government departments, and we discuss. We try to seek a resolution. But the underlying one is that workers who worked with the Government and were not entitled to a pension are currently in Grenada experiencing severe economic difficulty. They are coming to the Government after giving years of service, in some

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instances ten-plus years, for assistance with simple things. And it is not that we are upset about giving them the assistance. What we are upset about is that they gave years of service, and now they have retired into poverty. So that is the frustration that we need to resolve by putting this Bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, honestly, I stand here today as a pro-worker Member of Parliament, partly because of the contributions of my father towards Labour and because I, as a member of the National Democratic Congress, see the value of lifting the working people out of this country, out of their peril. And so, as part of the team, I feel proud today to associate myself with this Bill because it means, therefore, we have honestly begun the transformation of the lives of people.

When we talk about investing the low income houses in a direct way, as an exchange in a sense, vesting it to the landowner rather than just having them pay a little money and they staying there and they don't own it. This is a part of my own quest to build stronger social security.

But today, honestly, I must disagree with the position of the unions publicly, and I'm doing so, Mr. Speaker, without fair or favour. Because I listened to the position put forward by the President of the Public Workers Union on the matter, and he is attempting to tie in pay and grade review into this whole process of pension reform. But I want to say honestly, that is a non-starter, in my belief. Because the issue of pension reform, as I mentioned and other speakers mentioned, goes far beyond just the deductions and the question of disposable income. It is about providing the opportunity for workers to have some stability post-retirement; that social security. That is the issue. That is what we need to zero in on. When we talk pension, it's not now it's about the future.

So laying the foundation, how do we lay the foundation? Obviously, we need to do it in the now, and how it is best suited in a sustainable manner is through contributions on "Both Sides". That is what we believe, and that is what has worked throughout the world. So it's an investment they're making, Mr. Speaker, in their own future and I don't see anybody could go wrong with that.

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Additionally, Mr. Speaker, you heard it mentioned that workers have been regularised, and therefore, the regularisation process is going to take care of all of these discrepancies that are within the system. In other words, you wouldn't say that it covers an Imani Trainee. The expectation is when that trainee, over 12-plus years, has been promised, promised, and promised, is now regularised under this Administration, they will no longer be called an Imani. They will be a worker (**applause**) with guaranteed rights for what they are doing. So that's the difference. That's why it's not listed, and it's not rocket science. We have to see this thing for what it is. It is about the future and building for it.

So when the Department of Public Administration announced that the process had commenced, these were the elements that were being taken into account. But the final one which we must sort out is that the large amount of workers, unestablished, can't just automatically go on the established system. You know what will happen? It will burst the fund, right, that constitutional pension. So catering for them, putting the structure in place which, over time, is going to ease the burden not just on the state but overall on their pockets because when they retire, and they can't get their pension paid if Grenada get struck, God forbid, with any other natural disasters, this is going to limit the ability of the country to pay the pension because that constitutional pension is not too clear on setting aside a fund. It does not set aside a fund. It has to come from the coffers.

And so, oftentimes times, as mentioned, if you have to choose unproductive groups or categories to invest, because that will just come as a transfer payment, if you have to choose to invest there or to invest in productive workers or capacity of workers, you will choose the latter. And so you will essentially neglect the pensioners, and we don't want to do that, so that's why this reform is critical. Because if we are talking about regularising all the workers, if you're talking about ridding this country of this scourge of the concept of Imani, where you are a trainer for life, the best way to do that is to provide a platform.

And Mr. Speaker, let me give an example. This Administration, through the negotiations with the unions approved fringe benefits that for years, for years, were on

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the table. Workers today in the public service are better off after two and a half years. That cliché that they constantly ask whether people are better off and so on, the reality is, it is true. They are better off they get more benefits today. **(Applause)** And what we are saying is, Mr. Speaker, in addition to all of this, the reform of the pension is critical. Because, you see, you can't be pennywise and pound foolish. Yes, you want more money now, but laying the foundation is most important.

I like to speak from example. I wouldn't say why I'm speaking from example, but I could speak from example. Right? Because you see, Mr. Speaker, we fall victim to the nice talk. I listened to the Member of St. Mark talking about how she read the entire Bill, through you, and she didn't understand this, and she couldn't get that. See, they're busy on platforms spreading all kinds of propaganda about people. If you take the time to be responsible and read the contents of what is coming forward, you will know that we are doing that. So you wouldn't have to ask the question about where are these categories of workers, you would know that we are regularising people, and that's the business of the Government.

So the intention, Mr. Speaker, of this Bill, and I don't intend to be as long as my predecessor, but the intention of this Bill is not again to take away any rights from any worker and take away the constitutional pension. It is to provide an opportunity for the unestablished workers who are retiring into poverty to get an opportunity for a pension. Mr. Speaker, pension security is more important in the long run because if we have a situation of 4,000 plus workers unestablished when they retire, and we see it too often...

At the first Government town hall meeting there was a sister who came into the Trade Centre, and she expressed that she loved the fact that we were talking about pensions. She said that she worked with the Government, but on contract for x amount of years; I can't remember the exact amount, and the shocking answer to her then was that no, based on the current situation, you will not be entitled to a pension. What happens to that worker? And that is what this is seeking to do, to fight for that.

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So, there is no need to frustrate the process; I'm saying to the unions to come to the table. I have the greatest respect for Trade Unions. I think they serve a genuine purpose, which is to guarantee the rights of all workers, whether public or private sector. And so, what they need to do is to be responsible and not follow the whims and fancies or tunes of political opponents or adversaries to the Government just because they want to now help create this environment that they're an anti-worker, anti-this, anti-that when the record shows totally different.

So honestly, come to the table, this is my request to Brother Brian Grimes. Come and have a gentleman's conversation, don't get into this tabay and let us work this out for the best interest of all of the workers of the public service. **(Applause)** So, Mr. Speaker... **(Time bell rings).**

Mr. Speaker, if I could just get, I won't take five, but if I could just get one minute just to wrap up? So in the interest of time, I just want to touch on Part IV of clause 11, which is the...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable, Honourable, you have one minute to wrap up.

Hon. Ron Redhead: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. So I just want to touch on that because it's the composition of the Board. Now, two things come to mind: one, the current fund is non-contributory. But in addition to that, the determination of how the pension goes, where things and so on, is almost an open sepulchre; it's unmanaged. And so, this new Bill is going to help fix that existing problem. One, making the fund sustainable, and two, making it more accountable. So that is something, Mr. Speaker, that is in this Bill that I think we should embrace.

Mr. Speaker, again, in the interest of time, I want to say that one of the other benefits quickly is... Well, I see that I overran my time. So, I would like to wish my constituents a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and you and staff, Mr. Speaker, and the entire nation, I want to wish you an enjoyable Christmas Season 2024. Sorry.

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(Inaudible comment) Well, I'll do so when... Yes. But, Mr. Speaker, as you know, thanks very much, and I look forward to the continued debate. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. George North East, and I invite... Is it the MP for Carriacou? Yes, please take the floor.

Hon. Tevin Andrews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to add my voice to this historic, historic moment and historic period within our tenure as an Administration and as a Parliament. Mr. Speaker, history is being made and I'm happy to be on the right side of the history that's being made today. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker, as a Government and legislators, our responsibility is to create the enabling environment for the upward mobility of our citizens and to help stimulate our economy, not just for the now or the present but for the future. And I want you, Mr. Speaker, and the Honourable Members and our citizens, to pay attention to the actions that this Administration has taken over the past two years.

Mr. Speaker, promises were made and promises were kept **(applause)** all in the interests of the citizens of this country, all in the interests of the workers of this country and all in the interests of the future generation of this country. I am proud to be standing on the right side of history, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

So yes, the Pension Bill everything, everyone may not agree with, but no one here, Mr. Speaker, can't deny that it is the best decision to make at this point in time **(applause)** for the sustainability of the country and to ensure that workers, not just the established workers, but all workers within the service who are unestablished, who does not have a pension when they attain the retirement age, will be able to go home with something. I am happy that this Administration has made and has taken this bold step, and I am going to support this Bill 100%.

Decisions like paying the pension when we got in, bold decisions, life-altering and changing decisions that have positively impacted the lives of our pensioners and positively impacted our economy positively impacted all of us; decisions, like the minimum

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wage, which the “Other Side”, Mr. Speaker, failed to address under their watch. We made it our duty because we care about the working class. We care about the workers of this country. Therefore, our decisions and our actions reflect this passion for workers, and I could list all the other policies, and bills, and decisions and actions that we have taken for workers. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this team is a pro-working class. **(Applause)** I am proud of that.

But, Mr. Speaker, I don't intend to stay long. What I want to say might be a little bit controversial, but it is important to note it. The workers of this country must understand that we are serious and we genuinely care about them and our actions demonstrate it. We also want the same from the workers understanding the need for productivity in this country. So we are backing up what we said by making sure that we create the enabling environment for the working class, for our workers to ensure that they have the necessary pay increase, to ensure that their pay and grade situation is sorted out, to ensure that they are regularised and ensure that they have a pension and all of that.

But equally so, Mr. Speaker, we have to recognise that we have a serious problem in this country when it comes to productivity. When you call the ministry, some ministries wee hours in the morning or in the afternoon, you can't get to some ministries. Some workers are not producing. It's a fact. Let's not hide or shy away from it. Yes, I may get blows for making that statement, but it is a reality.

So therefore, I hope that the workers can see how genuine we are by making these decisions that will benefit them and the future generations of this country. I'm hoping that they would do the same by producing more, by becoming more productive for the sake of the economy and more so the future of this great nation called Grenada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique. I now invite the MP for St. Andrew North East to make her contribution.

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Hon. Kate Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, I rise to make my contribution to this Public Sector Employees (Pension Fund) Bill that is put forward before us, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is a historic day as stated by Members of the Government. However, Mr. Speaker, it seems like they are the only ones realising how historic this day is, they are the only ones touting and beating their chest about this day being historic. How do the workers feel about this day, Mr. Speaker? I do not see them celebrating. I'm not hearing them thanking the Government for this Bill that is put forward here today. Doesn't that say something to you, Mr. Speaker? It clearly means that the workers do not fully accept this Bill in its current construct. So to come and beat your chest about you on the right side of history, you should hold for a bit and just listen to the workers because the workers are now thinking about the impact this Bill will be having on their immediate livelihoods.

I've heard that the workers are asked to forgo their current lives for a life in the future. This is what was said here, Mr. Speaker. I'm not quoting. This is what was interpreted. **(Inaudible comment by a Member)**. It means, Mr. Speaker, that all of the challenges confronting the workers today should be put aside simply because, later on, things might be better. So, if things are not better today, how is it going to be better in many years to come if the workers survive the turbulent times in the present period?

Let us look at this Bill, which is a contributory pension scheme put forward here, asking the workers to contribute 3% and, in some cases, 6% based on their salary. However, do these rates consider the rise in the cost of living? Do these rates consider the fact that NIS will be increasing from 12% to 16% by 2031? How will you factor in any increase in salary, where this worker has to pay another 3% to secure a pension in the future, understanding that they're already paying a percentage to secure a NIS pension? And while it is touted to make people believe that there is no pension for workers after several years of working, the NIS pension is there. I'm not saying it is sufficient. I'm not saying it is the best.

History will remind us that the pension reform issue did not start today. History will remind us of 2018 when the MoU was signed with workers, and then talks broke down,

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and the workers went to court. They marched in the hot sun as was said; of course, it happened. And what happened in 2022 with the Glasgow judgment of restoring the 1958 pension law?

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that all workers, established or non-established, believe that they will all fall under the 1958 pension? So, here we are presenting to them after they were promised one public service, no parallel public service, and contract work is illegal... **(Inaudible comment by a Member)** You will understand the context if you only listen and analyse. So what was promised to the workers, Mr. Speaker, is different from what is presented yet today. They were promised one public service, meaning, I have to explain for those who didn't reach far in the education system, meaning that all workers will be treated the same according to the 1958 law, Mr. Speaker. That is what was made to believe. There will not be any parallel public service; all workers will be in that one public service. Today, we are presenting a Bill to cater for the unestablished public workers.

They were fooled into believing that all workers would be made permanent, regularised and fall under the 1958 Act. They were fooled once, let us see who will be fooled the second time. That is what we have to look at, Mr. Speaker, because we presented the workers with a plan to believe that the pension issue was an issue of the then Administration, our Administration not wanting to take care of the workers.

It was also stated that our Administration did not do anything for the workers, or maybe they did the most for workers. That's not true and the workers know better themselves. Do you remember the period of 2008 to 2013? Not a 1% increase was given to workers in their salaries. It took the New National Party Administration to come in in 2013 **(applause)** to pay all the retroactive payments to the workers and to give them an increase. How can they deliberately forget that, Mr. Speaker?

We always say that pension is not a one of payment. Thank God for the way that the New National Party Administration was governing the country so that when they came in, they could have made payments to the people who were qualified for the pension at the time. Thank God that they were funds that they didn't have to borrow; as was stated

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in their campaign, they would borrow to do it. Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker? The NNP Administration did not appeal the Hermilyn Armstrong case, and all those workers who fell in that category were paid their pension; over 7 million dollars were paid to the workers who were in that category. **(Applause)**

All this is saying is that, we did what we had to do. We also explained to the people that it is not easy. I remember then-Prime Minister Dr. Mitchell stated that we have to do something that will be sustainable for the country's economy; that's not what was stated at the time, the "Other Side". They stated or indicated to the people it will be done without any form of other contributions to be made. They never spoke about a contributory scheme. They only after, when they got in, they started to spoke about that. It's only after but not before. The people, the workers, are listening, and that is why today you only have one small group of people celebrating the historic day; how historic that is, Mr. Speaker?

It was also mentioned that this Bill repeals the Pension Disqualification Act. This is not true. Part of the Act, is section 7, Part VII if this Bill will be repealed but not the Pension Disqualification Act, Mr. Speaker. We must not continue to mislead our people deliberately like that. That is enough. Let's think about the workers and why they are not happy today because they're looking at how difficult it will be for them to manage their current living expenses. Government has not done anything to reduce or offset the cost of inflation that people are faced with now. So there was an increase in NIS last year, and a further increase is expected next year, together with the NIS contribution they are making with this new contribution on the backs of the workers...

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we understand that there is a need for pension reform because we spoke about it before, but not in this current construct and if you're going to discuss or put forward a Bill, all stakeholders, all those who will be impacted should feel comfortable with what is put forward. **(Applause)** No wonder the President of a particular union is unhappy at this time. He represents the workers and feels that the consultation process was flawed. It was inadequate and insufficient. It means that this Bill needs to go back to the drawing board. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

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

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise, and I feel that I'm continuing from where my colleague, the representative for St. Andrew North East, would have ended her presentation.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill that is presented before us today is very difficult to support it in its current construct. Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, I really wished that the Government representative who presented this Bill would have presented it for first reading only, and so, Mr. Speaker, given an opportunity for proper consultation on such a significant matter, something that is so deep, something that requires proper consultation...

And I listened, Mr. Speaker, over and over it was said that there was consultation, but the question is, what is consultation? What is it? Mr. Speaker, if I consult with you, there must be some kind of feedback from you in the process. But in one breath, we were told that we consulted and in another breath, we're told they did not participate.

(Applause) So, did we really have genuine consultations?

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, I noticed a trend in the presentation of these significant Bills. Mr. Speaker, the Public Finance Management Act clearly states, and I want to quote with your permission, Mr. Speaker, section 26 (1), "In each fiscal year, every proposed legislation submitted for approval by Parliament, shall be accompanied by a fiscal impact analysis, stating the proposed legislation's estimated effect on revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year in which the legislation would become effective, as well as the legislation's fiscal impact on multi-year planning and budgeting".

Mr. Speaker, at least you've expected in the presentation outside of the basic explanatory notes, some kind of financial impact assessment. What exactly are we projecting in the next year, in the next five years? How do we see that these monies are going to be paid into this fund? How do we see (the Government's contribution) that this

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is going to be sustainable? Mr. Speaker, I believe very strongly the Government needs to go back to the drawing board with this Bill **(applause)** for consultation and for proper analysis of the financial impact.

Mr. Speaker, the consultation that I'm speaking about, the feedback that I'm speaking about, Mr. Speaker, not just from workers and I want to give us an idea as to where we were in 2022. Mr. Speaker, I just want to reference very quickly a letter that came from the Attorney General's Office on 30th May 2022, addressed to Mr. Jimmy Bristol, the Union representative at the time, because we hear a lot about what the NNP plan as it relates to payment of pension. Mr. Speaker, I quote, and I would have to make requests, Mr. Speaker, the copies can be circulated. Mr. Speaker, it says, "Your letter dated 25th May and 18th May"... So the Government is responding a few days following a request or letter from the Union. The Union letter was on the 25th and 18th of May, and the Government responded on the 30th of May. Mr. Speaker, you hear union representatives saying, a year ago, they wrote a letter to the Government and are still waiting for a response on certain matters."

Mr. Speaker, the letter says, and I quote, "The Government of Grenada reaffirms its commitment to paying pension and gratuity to public officers". **(Applause)** It goes on to say, "Given the financial implications that are associated with commencing the making of payments and, importantly, the ability of the Government to sustain these payments consistently, the Government has taken the following steps to secure urgent recommendations that will inform a plan of action to put before all stakeholders affected by the High Court judgment regarding Public Sector Pensions". **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, it spoke about some of the steps that the Government was moving to take, engaging the IMF, the World Bank, the Union and all other stakeholders, Mr. Speaker.

But I want us to note two things. "... To determine...", Mr. Speaker, "... Quantifiable estimates of Government, outstanding and future and pension liabilities." **(Applause)** ... "To consider the fiscal options..." Mr. Speaker, the word sustainability was repeated over and over and over this morning. **(Applause)** That is all that this letter

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as saying sustainability, sustainability, sustainability. And hence the reason, Mr. Speaker, that we are rushing now to take action with the hope of achieving sustainability, the same sustainability that we spoke about in 2022.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind us this morning of where we were before the High Court ruling. Mr. Speaker, before the High Court ruling, the Government and the Union agreed on a few things that I want to reference this morning. All public officers will be part of the agreement, equity, and if you ask the unions right now, equity is one of their biggest concerns as it relates to this Bill. So there was no separation of public officers, contract and PSC appointed... Public officers were public officers under that arrangement, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

But in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that were agreed upon was that upon retirement, public officers were going to be paid 70% of their last salary. **(Applause)** But do you know, Mr. Speaker, that arrangement was putting these workers in a better position than the 1958 Act? **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, that is what our Government was prepared to do for the workers that I heard this morning we don't care about. **(Laughter)**

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that was agreed upon even before the judgment, so we haven't reached the judgment as yet, before the judgment that is in forming this Bill, we agreed with the Union that workers, upon retirement, will not be required to pay anything **(applause)** additional, Mr. Speaker... Persons who were coming thereafter.

Mr. Speaker, is not what we... You see, that's the problem. **(Inaudible comment by a Member)** Mr. Speaker, we are not talking here... What I'm telling you here, in case you don't know, is not what we're planning to do; it was what we did. **(Applause)** So, I'm trying to explain to you. You probably were busy talking, so you didn't hear me. I'm not talking, Mr. Speaker, in case somebody missed it... I'm not talking about what we were planning to do after the elections. What I'm reading to you here is what we did before the elections, and that workers were in a better off position than in the position they would have been under the 1958 Act. 70% of their last salary.

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Mr. Speaker, as I also said, the issue of equity was catered for, so we said workers across the board. Mr. Speaker, the judgement came, and I now want to speak on this strategic approach that I referenced in that letter. Mr. Speaker, when the judgment came, we said as an Administration that we were not going to appeal the judgment. **(Inaudible comment by a Member)** And it is demonstrated very clearly, Mr. Speaker, in the letter that we wrote. As a matter of fact... As a matter of fact, we went beyond that, so it was guaranteed. **(Inaudible comment by Members)** Mr. Speaker, I think that's the fundamental point. I hope you can hear me, Mr. Speaker.

The fundamental point is that whichever Government won the election had no choice **(applause)** but to pay the pension, and that is because, Mr. Speaker, the period for an appeal expired under our Administration. **(Applause)** So whether you are NNP, NDC, GULP, TMP or whatever you are, you had an obligation to pay. But you know what is also fundamental, Mr. Speaker? You couldn't pay it if the money was not there. **(Applause)** That is the fundamental point. So when the National Democratic Congress Government spoke and boasted about the payment of pensions, there's one thing that we must remember in that boast that it was the funds left under the **(applause)** NNP Administration that paid the pension. So no problem, you chose a model that was different...

Mr. Speaker: Just a moment. Honourable MP, just hold

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: ...to our model.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable MP, just hold.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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Mr. Speaker: I'm having too much murmuring coming from my right. I know where they are coming from, but I encourage you to keep them down. Proceed, Honourable MP.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I'm making the point, and I don't know if the objective is to throw me off track, but, Mr. Speaker, it won't happen. **(Laughter)**

Mr. Speaker, following the judgment, we made a request to the union to sit and talk. And you know what I believe this morning? Had the union sit and talk with us, we wouldn't be having this conversation this morning. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, I say to us this morning that there is no Government that has sought the interest and has done for the workers of this country as the New National Party Government. **(Applause)**

So, Mr. Speaker, when we speak about that period, the Government was just concerned about one thing, economic growth, fiscal and debt sustainability because we were thinking down the road. The same thing we are coming back this morning to say, we are thinking about down the road. That is what we were thinking about when we proposed what we proposed.

But I heard this morning, Mr. Speaker, that we introduce pension. **(Laughter)** Mr. Speaker, are we really serious? Mr. Speaker, when the NNP Administration left office, the number of pensioners on payroll was 2,200. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, the payment of pension is not something that started after the last general elections. **(Inaudible comment by a Member)**

Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, the other thing that we need to note is that when this first court ruling came out, I'm not talking about the one that came out just before the elections, prior to that, Mr. Speaker, Hermilyn Armstrong and others. Mr. Speaker, that court ruling came out under the NDC Administration in 2011. **(Laughter)** Mr. Speaker, nothing was done to pay these people according to the judgment. It was the NNP Administration **(applause)** that came back in 2018 and made the payment of all those

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about 56 workers that were affected. Mr. Speaker, you can't be talking seriously if you say that we are anti-workers.

Mr. Speaker, I heard this morning, and I couldn't believe it. I heard this morning it is no longer relevant. My colleague from St. Andrew North East was reminding the Government that you said there would be one public service, and there'll be an end to contract work because the contract is illegal; with the stroke of a pen, we're going to make everybody permanent, she reminded us of those commitments. Mr. Speaker, I could not believe it. I'm sitting here, and in response to what she was saying, people are saying this is no longer relevant; what's the relevance of this? Mr. Speaker, it appears that we say one thing to win and then another thing after we would have won.

But, Mr. Speaker, all that being said, I still want to appeal to this Administration that this Bill is too significant to rush it through today. You expressed concern that we are saying **(inaudible comment by a Member)** in one breath, it's important, and in another breath, we are saying don't rush it. I agree that it may sound contradictory, but, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you why it's not. I believe that workers **(time bell rings)** would be worse off if we passed this Bill today. If we take them back, Mr. Speaker, to 2022 and start there, they will be better off than they will be under this Bill **(applause)** Mr. Speaker, if it passes today.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage the Government. I want to plead. I want to beg the Government that after our presentation, some consideration is given to holding on to the passing of this Bill for further consideration. Mr. Speaker, there are persons who are going to be seriously disadvantaged if this is passed today. And you see, we may jump up if you're an NNP or NDC. This is not about politics. This is not about party. This is about the workers who are going to be affected by the passage of this.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this Bill...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

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Mr. Speaker: You heard the bell? Did you hear the bell?

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: No, I'm sorry. I did not hear the bell.

Mr. Speaker: I get the sense you didn't hear it.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Mr. Speaker, can I request kindly...

Mr. Speaker: But the bell went.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: ... an additional three minutes?

Mr. Speaker: The bell went. I extend your time by 1 minute.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you so much. So, Mr. Speaker, I end by saying that I believe that this Bill opens a door for additional legal actions. I believe that this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is taking workers backwards if we pass it. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that too many workers would be affected if they carefully study the content of this Bill. Additionally, I believe, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill is going to financially and economically affect too many persons who would have worked very hard for their money. And so, Mr. Speaker, I close by saying, please let us reconsider passing this Bill today. Thank you.
(Applause)

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable MP for St. Andrew South East. And I now give way to the Honourable MP for St Andrew North West.

Hon. Delma Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my full support for the Public Sector Employee (Pension Fund) Bill, 2024. Mr. Speaker,

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this Bill represents a transformative step forward in ensuring the financial security, dignity and welfare of public sector employees in our country.

Mr. Speaker, for decades there have been a growing need to establish a modern, equitable and sustainable pension scheme that adequately supports the retirement aspiration of public servants while balancing economic realities. Mr. Speaker, this Bill addressed those needs comprehensively and responsibly. So we could hear of the decisions made while in the campaign, Mr. Speaker, because you can use the information you have at that time to make decisions, but when you get into Government, there are economic realities. Mr. Speaker, and so this Bill is not getting away from what was promised, but ensuring that you provide for all public sectors. That is what this Bill intends to do **(applause)** not only for the established workers, but this Bill provides for all workers in the Government sector.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud, to stand on this side of history, where this Government has not only fulfilled an election promise by honouring the court's decision to pay the pension to retired and retiring public officers on the establishment but also taken the bold step to address a decade long of iniquity, inequity, sorry, Mr. Speaker, while adhering to the court **(inaudible comment by Members) (laughter)** was a necessary step to the respect of rule and law and ensuring justice for these individuals. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker, I'm still wondering because, you see, different people can make different statements, but I have an issue when a woman of God says that there's no time at all we ever thought about going to court, appealing the judge's decision because it was on the table. Addressing... Mr. Speaker, it was on the table for consideration, and maybe those now will not accept, but there are others outside who were a part of the team then who would have accepted that we were considering appealing the court decision. But we have to be honest, Mr. Speaker.

We heard about a letter in May, but we heard of an election in June. **(Applause)** So if you have an election in June, Mr. Speaker, we cannot appeal. **(Applause)** Our hands were tied. **(Applause)** Our hands were tied, Mr. Speaker, and we have to be honest. We can be honest and say we had intentions because we thought it was going

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to bankrupt the country. The truth is, all of us thought so based on the information that we were given at the time. So all of us... It was a discussion, and in another case, if I say here everybody agreed, then I'll be dishonest in my deliberations. So maybe a lot of the Members opposed going against the judgment, but it was a decision that was on the table, and the election was close.

So we cannot in good faith, Mr. Speaker, object to a reform because we know that a reform is important if we ought to cater for all our workers. Mr. Speaker, despite the warnings, and it's important to make that point of bankrupting the country, this new Government, a team we called "inexperienced" and "rookie"... Even me called you so. **(Laughter)** You stepped forward, and you were able to pay the pension, Mr. Speaker, **(applause)** and fulfil the court's ruling and did so without the nation becoming bankrupt. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be part of and support this Bill because I came before being the Minister of Social Development, and many times, there are workers who retire, and they would come in seeking the support of educational empowerment, the SEED Programme because they're saying that we are not getting a pension from Government. Yes, they're getting something from NIS, but it must still be on the table with this new reform. So we have to let people know that you'll be getting your NIS as well as getting this new pension.

And this new pension, Mr. Speaker, we heard about people who are not happy. So what would you be happy about? Just getting NIS and retiring in poverty or getting a pension that was not there before? Everyone will get it. And so we hear the talk about making everyone permanent, but, Mr. Speaker, when we have this reform in place, then we will not have an issue where workers have contracts again, including all Imani trainees. **(Applause)** We have already started the transitional process, and maybe we are not doing enough because from the Government sector, maybe over 400 or 500 people have been regularised. Within the Imani Programme for this year, over 200 hundred persons were regularised, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

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Mr. Speaker, it must be noted that the decision to adhere to the court did not address the plight, and that is important for us to note, of the public officers who are not on the establishment, and this Bill is important in that regard. This is why the reform Bill is so significant. It creates a framework that includes the public sector employees ensuring that no one is left behind. **(Applause)** For the first time, we are introducing a pension structure that is inclusive, equitable, and sustainable, addressing decades of disparity. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker, this is proof, that this Government is committed to responsible governance. We are not talking about the election campaign. We are talking about responsible governance. We have not only honoured the past, but we are building, on a foundation for the future, a pension system that is fair to all public officers and financially sustainable for generations to come. I thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: All right. Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North West, and I now give the floor to the MP for St. George South.

Hon. Andy Williams: Good afternoon. Mr. Speaker, and I will be short, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let me just start by saying that I am not surprised that the Members of the Opposition are opposing this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, according to Matthew 7:16-20, it says, “¹⁶You will know them by their fruits”. **(Applause)** Not by their talk, but by their fruits. “Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷Even so, every good tree bears good fruits, but the bad tree bears bad fruits. ¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown...” out of office” ... Sorry. **(Laughter)** “...and thrown into the fire. ²⁰So then, you know them by their fruits.

In this verse, Jesus warns his listeners to be weary of the false prophets **(inaudible comment by Members)** who may appear to be sheep, but are actually hungry wolves.

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The way to identify them is by the fruits of their lives and their teachings. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Very, very interesting MP for St. George South. I now invite the Leader for Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to first express my deep appreciation to the Members who have made their contributions to the discussion here in respect of this Bill. I want to make just a few observations. I'm trying to restrain myself because of time, but just a few observations.

First and foremost, the Opposition spoke about, Mr. Speaker, the additional burden being placed on employees. A very emotional appeal as if to say that setting aside for the rainy day, for the times in which you retire, is almost as if we're committing a crime by partnering with our employees to ensure that they have a pension. I want to submit to this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, that investments like pensions and NIS are what we call social money hedges, which hedge against income losses due to unemployment and other forms of loss of income when the employee is not regularly engaged by the employer. These hedges are extremely important. It is not a tax. This is a hedge to protect the employee during the most vulnerable stage of life when they have to depend on medication to survive and other things.

And so, Mr. Speaker, there are many stories, many stories of people, within the service who operated on contract, who were not established workers, when they left the service, Mr. Speaker, not having a pension. I recall stories that were told to me how certain employees, when they faced the reality of no longer being employed by the Government, literally lost their minds, got ill and died because of the adverse effect of not having a pension in place to take care of these employees. There are a lot who actually do believe that they qualify for a pension, but in actual fact, they do not. And so we must take cognisance of that reality, and as a responsible people, loving, caring Government, we must make the necessary provisions, and that is what this Bill seeks to do.

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We simply, Mr. Speaker, cannot continue to kick the can down the road by making fake excuses like we need more consultation. Really and truly, there is no genuine cry for consultation. That's not the case here. The case here is that this Government is making a solid move towards protecting the employees (**applause**) which the previous administration failed to do during their tenure, even when they had two back-to-back absolute majorities in the House. They failed, Mr. Speaker, to make these necessary adjustments to protect our employees. And so because we are the ones doing it, they have to make all kinds of reasons why they cannot support it. That is why today, Mr. Speaker, we shall call for a division on this Bill because we want to know, Mr. Speaker, who actually supports these employees.

Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, is one that supports and does not hurt our workers. And I say this, let us not be fooled. Let us not be fooled by the loudspeakers, by those who are trigger crazy on Facebook and other social media platforms and by those who think they have the support of workers. Let us not be fooled by all the drama. Let us answer the tough questions; is this beneficial to the workers? And if this does not exist, then what is there in place to support the retirement of our workers. If not this, then what?

And I must say, this morning; I am a bit disappointed. I must add that I'm a bit disappointed because I really genuinely expected a better level of contribution to this Bill from the Opposition. I'm a bit disappointed because although we had a lot of debate, Mr. Speaker, most of the debates coming from the Opposition were not relevant to this Bill, and we could have actually objected, but we waited and waited, person after person to hear stirring contributions to enlighten us about things that we can improve, but nothing was forthcoming. All we heard was emotions and emotions and emotions and an appeal so that people could be fooled into not supporting this. But I believe, Mr. Speaker, that our workers are much wiser than this. The question is, if not this, then what?

So, I want to pause here because, in the interest of time, we have another Bill that we want to get passed, so I will pause here, and I want to again express my appreciation

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to everyone who has contributed to this, and I now commit this Bill back to... **(Inaudible comment) (Applause)**

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Deputy Clerk: A Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Public Sector Employees (Pension Fund) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Leader for Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg to move that the House resolves itself to a Committee of the whole House to consider this Bill, 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 with two amendments. Leader of Government's Business.

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

Question put and agreed to.

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Chairman's Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

Deputy Clerk: A Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Public Sector Employees (Pension Fund) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Members, at this point, I wish to propose to this Honourable House that we break for lunch as we have another Bill to be tabled and discussed. I don't know what your wish is. It is by my watch 2:07 p.m., and based on the nature of today's Sitting, I propose that we break for lunch, have an abbreviated lunch... **(Inaudible comment by a Member)** Continue? Well, let me take the vote. If you want to continue, I will take the vote. Right? My wish is that we break, but if I'm hearing the view that you want to continue and finish, it's fine with me. So I put you to the vote. **(Inaudible comment by Members)** Just hold, please. I am putting to the vote, and from the results, we will decide.

Honourable Members, those who like to continue the Sitting until the second Bill is finished before we take our lunch break, can I see by the raise of your hand? Those who want to continue. So we have three. Right? **(Laughter)** We have a late four. Right? Those who wish that we break now and return in about 40 minutes' time, can I see by the raise of your hand? Raise your hand. Right. So, it is carried we have to continue. Four voted for us to continue, and two voted that we break now. So I go with the wish of the House, so we continue the Sitting. Go ahead. Leader of Government's Business.

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Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce, for its first reading, a Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (Judicial Officers Pensions) Bill, 2024. Thanks.

Deputy Clerk: A Bill which seeks to provide for the payment of pensions and gratuity in respect of service of judicial officers of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, shortly entitled, Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (Judicial Officers Pension) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Relevant Standing Order be suspended to enable the Bill to be taken through all its stages at this Sitting. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Relevant Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

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

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Leader for Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to provide for the payment of pensions and gratuities in respect of the service of a judicial

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officer of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court. This Bill contains three Parts and 18 Clauses.

Part I, Mr. Speaker... And, Mr. Speaker, similarly to the previous Bill, I would try to summarise some of what I consider the more important aspects of the Bill. So Part I provides the preliminary provisions and contains clauses 1 to 4. Clause 1, of course, speaks to the short title of the Bill. Clause 2 provides for the interpretation, and the Bill applies to judicial officers, that is, the Chief Justice, Justice of Appeal, High Court Judge or a Master of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court.

Part II, Mr. Speaker, speaks of the pensions and gratuities, section 5 speaks to the charging of the amounts to the Consolidated Fund and states that, "There shall be charged on and paid out of the Consolidated Fund all such sums of money as may from time to time be payable by way of pension or gratuity in pursuance of this Act and the Supreme Court Order."

The circumstances on which these may be paid are as follows, section 6, "A pension may be granted under this Act to a judicial officer on his or her retirement from judicial service on or after he or she has served at least five continuous years of service on attaining the age of retirement, as well as, if there is an abolition of his or her office, as well as, if the judicial officer retires on the ground of incapacity by a way of any infirmity of mind or body on a permanent basis.

The retirement, Mr. Speaker, as per section 7 of the Act, the judicial officer shall retire from office on the attainment of the retirement age. Notwithstanding subsection (1) but subject to subsection (3), a judicial officer may retire from office if he or she gives to the Commission at least 12 months' notice in writing of his or her intention to do so. Subsection (3), the period of notice under subsection (2) does not include a period of vacation leave, whether it's earned before or during the period of such notice.

The rates of pension are to be calculated for the various levels of judicial officers as follows—

- (a) In the case of the Chief Justice—

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- (i) If he or she has had continuous service as a judicial officer for a period not less than 10 years, the pension is equal to their annual pensionable emoluments attached to the office of the Chief Justice; or
 - (ii) If he or she has had continuous service as a judicial officer for a period of less than ten years but not less than five years, the pension is computed on a pro-rated basis calculated by dividing the number of years of continuous service by 10 years (which is maximum in this category) and multiplying the result by the annual pensionable emoluments attached to the office of Chief Justice;
- (b) In the case of a Justice of Appeal—
- (i) The period of continuous service is a period of 12 years (as opposed to 10, as stated earlier under the Chief Justice). So the Justice of Appeal must serve for a period of 12 years of continuous service and then, of course, the full emoluments, the full amount.
 - (ii) If, however, there is a period of service of less than 12 years, then it is pro-rated in a similar fashion, divided by the number of years, which is 12, and multiplied by the result of the annual pensionable monuments for the position of Justice of Appeal.
- (c) In the case of the High Court Judge—
- (i) The period if he or she has had continuous service, in this case, for a period of 15 years, the pension is equal to the annual pensionable emoluments attached to the office of the High Court Judge.

So it's a similar fashion. As long as you meet the required number of years for that category, you get your full pension, as for the emoluments that you were getting previously.

- (ii) If there is service for less than the period of 15 years, then again, the pension is pro-rated in a similar fashion, divided by 15 years and multiplied by the service years and by the amount of emoluments to get the High Court Judges pension.

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(d) In the case of a Master—

(i) The period again is 15 years and is a similar fashion to that of the High Court Judge.

So the formulas remain basically the same, it's just the years of service that are different.

Payment of a pension. Section 11 subsection (2) and (5), a pension payable under sections 8 and 9 must be paid monthly in arrears (at the end of the month basically) with effect from the date of retirement in pensionable circumstances and, subject to the Act, continues to be paid during the lifetime of the person entitled to a pension. So, the pension is basically a lifetime pension, and as stated earlier, it comes out of a Consolidated Fund. This is not, Mr. Speaker, this is not a contributory scheme as was discussed earlier. This one is a non-contributory scheme, and it is basically paid out of the Consolidated Fund as stated.

So a judicial officer, otherwise qualified for pension under section 8(a)(i), (b)(i), (c)(i) of (d)(i), who resigns from office before attaining the retirement age, shall—

(a) receive a pension under section 8 or a reduced pension and gratuity under section 9 on attaining retirement age. So if you retire before, yes, then when you get to the age, you get that reduced pension.

I think I made a mistake. If you resigned before then, you will get the pension upon retirement age, so it is triggered by the age. Right

(b) at the time of resignation (that's provided that you resign before), the judicial officer should specify whether or not the person who opts to receive a pension in accordance with section 8 or whether or not the judicial officer opts for what we call a reduced pension and gratuity under section 9.

So they have the choice of choosing which option is preferred but they must do so on retirement so at least they know exactly how to go about it.

Subject to section 4, where persons referred to under subsection (2) die before obtaining retirement age, there must be paid to his or her spouse. So if die before leaving

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a spouse before, the pension would be now paid to the spouse. In the case where there is not a spouse, it is paid to the person's estate.

Repeal. Section 17. Subject to 18, the Supreme Court of Grenada and the West Indies Associated States (Rates of Pension) (Judges) Act, Chapter 315A is hereby repealed.

Finally. Savings. Section 18, notwithstanding section 17, the Supreme Court of Grenada and the West Indies Associated States (Rates of Pension) (Judges) Act, Chapter 315A shall continue to apply to a person who was, immediately before the coming into operation of this Act, receiving a pension under that Act and a person who was a judicial officer immediately before the coming into operation of this Act who opts not to be subject to this Act under section 3.

So this is it, Mr. Speaker. Basically, this Act is simply following suit with the rest of the OECS with this enactment so as to make it harmonised in the region so that judges serving in any one of the territories can actually serve knowing that their pension is guaranteed whichever jurisdiction they're serving in. And so this is basically very automatic. One might say that we ought to comply as a nation to make this consistent throughout the region.

So, I commend this Bill to the House. I see that we still do have an Opposition, so I really thank the lone Member for holding the fort. I commend this to the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Leader of Government's Business. Honourable MP for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be very brief. I stand to support the Bill Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (Judicial Officers Pensions) Bill, 2024. And again, I just want to repeat something that the Leader of Government's Business mentioned, which is that it's an OECS Bill that has been commissioned and has

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been passed in all the other islands except Grenada. And so, we would like to basically correct that issue and make sure that Grenada is being compliant so that the judicial officers will get their pension as proposed. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, MP for St. Patrick East. Honourable Prime Minister.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your recognition. I, too, wish to lend my support to the Bill as presented by the Leader for Government's Business and Mr. Speaker, obviously, the Bill before also dealt with pensions, and this Bill is also dealing with pensions. And, Mr. Speaker, I think out of an abundance of caution, to ensure that we can answer the mischief that oftentimes people sew, it's perhaps important for us to talk a little about pensions in the general context and the various classes of public officers who the law recognise as being entitled to receive pensions and it starts with the office of the Governor General.

There's a specific Act that deals with pensions for whoever serves as Governor-General. I would not go on to say what those benefits are, but there's very little difference between an active and a retired Governor-General in terms of the emoluments that are paid to them. Thankfully, we don't have a lot of... **(Inaudible comment by Members)** Actually, I don't think there are any remaining retired Governors-General.

The next category is, in fact, judicial officers. And again, there's at any given time one Governor-General and usually one or two, if that many, in retirement. As it stands now, we don't have Sir Daniel, having departed recently. For judicial officers assigned to Grenada, that's important; we don't have a lot. At best, I think there may be five High Court Judges at any given time in Grenada. When I started practice, there used to be two at best, Justice Lyle St. Paul and Brian Alleyne were the two judges. Overtime, we managed to get two or three to deal with significant increases in mitigation, mostly civil litigation, as well as to deal with the challenges posed by the impacts of Hurricane Ivan that led to a large backlog in criminal cases and so on.

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So this Bill is only seeking, really, to address at any given time four or five judges assuming they retire in Grenada and that's important. I think I saw some sort of post where someone was suggesting that we are going and give money to our big friends, and we are seeking to take away the public officers' pension. I want to repeat. You see that's how they refer to juridical officers, not appreciating that the Judiciary is an equal constitutionally established part of the state, and had it not been for the Judiciary, the public officers would not have gotten their pension. **(Applause)** Had it not been for the Glasgow ruling, the Executive would have been able to continue not paying the public officers their pension.

And so this is a classic case of how the separation of powers works and how we can have checks and balances on the excess and the abuse of power that can happen, especially in circumstances where you had the Executive controlling the Legislature because you had no Opposition. So you had a 15-member-parliament, you had no Opposition in Parliament and so if you didn't have a Judiciary to say there is still something says the rule-of-law, there is still something called the Constitution and you have to check the legislation passed in Parliament by the constitutionality test we may not have being in a position where the public officer's receive the funds they receive.

So too, judicial officers are entitled to pensions. In a sense, this is pension reform, as well, because what this is seeking to do is to avoid anomalies in the pension benefits for judges of the Supreme Court of the Eastern Caribbean, because it is one court; anomalies that can arise by virtue purely of the accidents of where you retire. You would appreciate most of the judges... In fact, I don't think there is an Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Judge in Grenada who is a Grenadian. And you would find that when you go to other islands, most of the judges are not from that island, and so they may retire in a place that they are not from.

What you don't want is a situation where people forum shop, where, if pension benefits are better in St. Lucia, they try and see if they get a post in St. Lucia closer to retirement to get a better benefits or if is in Grenada, you know, they try and hopefully beg the Chief Justice, well send me in Grenada because, you know, or if it is in the BVI

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where fellas get paid in US, well they'll say send me to the BVI. So it's really meant to ensure that there is harmony across the board in terms of addressing pensions payable to judicial officers.

I also want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that there is a separate Act passed in 1989 and then amended in 2003 that gives pensions to Members of Parliament and I think on my last reading it said after eight, more or less eight and a half years. So two terms. Not even two terms, a term and 2/3 you get pension. Eight and a half years, Mr. Speaker. And there are public officers who have been working in the public service for 15 years, 10 years, and we think it is okay for them not to get a pension? When Members of this House back in 1989, note the year and 2003, enacted legislation to give Members of Parliament a pension.

Now, I'm not saying that Members of Parliament are not entitled to a pension. I'm saying people work for the state, this is the broader point. We ought to, within our limited resources, encourage retirement savings, encourage pension payments, encourage some type of gratuity payments that allow us to save and pull our resources for the inevitable. You can't work forever. When that time comes, we need to be in a position where at least we can take care of ourselves or make sure that people don't go home and then basically have no means of living.

And so whether it is judicial officers, whether it is the Governor-General, whether it is Members of Parliament, whether it is Government Ministers... I don't know. Do Government Ministers have a pension? I don't think so. **(Laughter)** Right? If Government Ministers have a pension, you know, and obviously public officers, and we then want to ensure that the statutory bodies, and we want to encourage private employers, in addition to the NIS, to also look at establishing pension plans.

Because the facts are, Mr. Speaker, that if you look at countries with a robust pension plan system, you would see that they tend to fuel economic growth and development. I can give a good example, probably one of the best examples, is the European Nation of Holland or the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as it's probably its more formal name. They are one of the most robust pensions systems in the world and their

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pension plans and their pension funds are extremely wealthy and have been able to go on and invest in significant economic activity worldwide and we need to be able to put our plans not just the NIS funds, the Government plans in a position to do a similar thing.

And I want to make this point because you see sometimes we think we're fighting for what's in our best interest and we're not. And I want to reiterate, the constitutionally guaranteed pension for established officers is an unfunded plan. It's unfunded. There is no money being set aside for it, unlike the contributory plans. Unfortunately, this one suffers from the same challenges as well. It's not funded. It's coming out of the general coffers, so there is no segregation of the fund. There is no protection. There is nobody keeping an eye on it. There is no investment or actuarial reports being done. So what you have is if there is a risk to the Government's fiscal resources, you then have a risk to whether you will be able to be paid. Constitutional law or not, you have to deal with the reality. If you give a man bread to sell, and before he sells the bread, he is supposed to pay you back, and a man robs him, unless he has resources in his pocket to be able to repay him, the reality is, even though contractually he supposed to pay you back, he is going to run into a difficult time.

So I'm saying, when these defined benefit plans were considered, the public service was 200 people or maybe 300 people, that's 1958. That's 20 years before Grenada became an independent country. In 1958, they weren't secondary schools in most of Grenada, people were going to primary schools. If you went to a secondary school, your parents probably had to pay for it. So we have to understand the context in which those things apply. And when you have now the Government employing thousands and thousands of people, it's not sustainable. It's one thing if you are paying a defined benefit to four or five people. And so we have to understand that taxpayer's money that funds these unfunded pension plans.

So we respect what has happened, but we also have to be honest about the need for us to make sure that there is sustainability in the things that we are doing. 40 years ago there was no National Insurance Scheme. It would have been only the public officers then who would have had a pension. The rest of the people, unless there is a private

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employer who is magnanimous enough to do that, it means the vast majority of Grenadians were working without any pension or social safety net or social security. And you would see that throughout the region that the same and NIS was passed throughout almost all of the island at the same time.

So, there is a need for us to continue the conversation about the importance of pensions, about bringing more and more people on board. The bus drivers, the barbers, the nail techs, the people who owned the hair salon, the people who have clothing stores, the people who are tailors and seamstresses. If there is no retirement framework for them to pay and save money, they too will drive a bus until they're 60, 70, and can't drive anymore and then will have nothing.

So what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that as part of the broader context, everybody who works, the goal should be to get us to a point where everybody who works from the Governor-General come down should be in a position where as a country we have formalised properly managed, properly run pension and retirement schemes that can support our workers when they get to their golden years and that they can go in dignity and they can go with the assurance that they have their little "cacada" that will allow them to at least maintain a decent standard of living and that includes judicial officers, Mr. Speaker.

So I commend the Bill to you and I hope... There is a special thing about people from St. Mark. Mr. Speaker, you see only the MP for St. Mark is still here, soldiering on. So I hope we get her support for the Bill, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. **(Laughter)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Prime Minister. Thank you very much. Leader of Government's Business, I am not seeing anybody else.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank the Prime Minister for his expression of support. And by silence I thank all the other Members, including the lone Opposition Member who is here faithfully with us for **(inaudible comment by a Member)**

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the support. **(Laughter)** And I now, Mr. Speaker, commend this Bill to the House for its second reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Deputy Clerk: A Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (Judicial Officers Pensions) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

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

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: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Chairman's Report be adopted.

Question put and agreed to.

Chairman's Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

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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.

Deputy Clerk: A Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (Judicial Officers Pensions) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

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

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew North West, your light is on?

Hon. Delma Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this time to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a bright and prosperous New Year, but also to the people of St. Andrew North West, I recommit my support to work with you and so I look forward to seeing you during the holiday as we share with those who need our assistance and we provide good tidings to the children across the constituency. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North-West. Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to express my appreciation to my constituents who stood with me throughout the year 2024, especially during my

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period of illness when I was operating on half power. I just want to say how much I appreciate them and I look forward to 2025 when we work closer together. I also want to wish all of my family, my friends, constituents, employees, Ministers of Government, MPs and everyone a very Merry Christmas and a bright and wonderful 2025. Thank you.

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

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also take the opportunity to express particularly for the citizens, as I call them, of St. David best wishes for the holiday season. I want to emphasise that we need to do everything in moderation. There is really no upside to excess so whether it is on the alcohol, whether it's on the ham, whether it's on the cake, whether it's on the food that we moderate. The only thing I would say we should do in excess is to spend time with our loved ones.

This has been a really testing year. A lot has happened. It's our 50th Anniversary as an independent nation. I think we've had a very successful commemorative series of events to mark that, and as we were coming out of that, we got punched with Hurricane Beryl. We've been double punched by the heavy rains and the flooding that has happened, but for the most part, we are still here united, I think stronger than ever, demonstrating our resilience to each other, demonstrating our resilience to the world and to the region.

I also want to thank the Members of CARICOM, in particular, for the unyielding support they've provided to me and to the Government and people of Grenada, in particular, in the last six months. I will be the outgoing Chairman of CARICOM at the end of December and Prime Minister Mottley will take over in the New Year. But I really do want to place on record my appreciation to my CARICOM colleagues for the tremendous support they have provided to me and to Grenada during the difficult times that we've had.

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Adjournment

But I think all in all, Mr. Speaker, we can certainly say we've been tested, we've been tried, but as the MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique said here this afternoon, I think, we're on the right side of history and we are demonstrating that as a nation we could bounce back faster and better from the challenges that we face and I am just grateful for the opportunity provided to me to be part of a team that remains united, that remains committed and earnest in their unyielding desire to serve the people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. And so when we talk about putting people first, that's just not a slogan, it is something that we live by and our commitment to the citizens of this country is the reason why we were elected to serve as Members of Parliament and redouble our commitment to doing so in 2025, 2026 and beyond.

There are no elections being called in Grenada in 2025. There are a lot of elections taking place in the region though, starting with places like Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Bahamas in the not too distant future, St. Lucia the year after that's assuming everybody goes their full term. But we are only now getting started and as the two MPs at the extreme right of this Chamber said, "you haven't seen nothing yet". Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. I sense no one else wants to comment. I use the opportunity, myself, as Speaker to thank the Members of this Honourable House for looking after the business of the nation the way you have done. In my view, it was by and large an experience of camaraderie from "Both Sides" looking at the common goal of this country.

I want to thank our legal counsel who've always been here with us. I want to thank you, the police officers, who've ensured that the mace doesn't get thrown outside **(laughter)** and things like that, but for having our police officers there. And for the entire staff of Parliament, the Clerk and all those who have worked in Parliament and with Parliament during the past year. My wish is that every one of us would have a restful, reflective, and Christ-centered Christmas and as we enter 2025, may the grace of God rest upon us all. Thank you very much. **(Applause)**

***Sitting of the House of Representatives
held on Wednesday 18th December, 2024
at Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's***

Adjournment

Question put and agreed to.

The Sitting of the House of Representatives adjourned *sine die* at 2:51 p.m.

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