



GRENADA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SECOND SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

TUESDAY 4TH JUNE, 2024

***Sitting of the House of Representatives
held on Tuesday 4th June, 2024
at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's***

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Attendance

PRESENT

Mr. Speaker

Honourable Leo Cato, MP

in the Chair

- | | |
|--|--|
| Honourable Dickon Mitchell, MP
<i>(St. David)</i> | - Prime Minister & Minister for National Security, Home Affairs, Information, Disaster Management & Public Administration, Infrastructure and Physical Development, Public Utilities & Civil Aviation and Transportation |
| Honourable Philip A. Telesford, MP
<i>(St. George South-East)</i> | - Minister for Health |
| Honourable 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 Kerryne Z. James, MP
<i>(St. John)</i> | - Minister for Climate Resilience, the Environment and Renewable Energy |
| Honourable Ron Livingston Redhead, MP
<i>(St. George North-East)</i> | - Member |
| Honourable Delma Thomas, MP
<i>(St. Andrew North-West)</i> | - Minister for Mental Health, Wellness, and Religious Affairs, with a special focus on the Mt. Gay Psychiatric Hospital |
| Honourable Andy Williams, MP
<i>(St. George South)</i> | - Minister for Mobilisation, Implementation and Transformation |

***Sitting of the House of Representatives
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Attendance

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith C. Mitchell, PC, MP, JP - Leader of His Majesty's Opposition
(*St. George North-West*)

Honourable. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen, MP - Deputy Speaker
(*St. Mark*)

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

Honourable Kate Lewis-Peters, MP - Member
(*St. Andrew North-East*)

Honourable Emmalin Pierre, MP - Member
(*St. Andrew South-East*)

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***Prayers
Minutes***

The Sitting of the House of Representatives began at 9:05 a.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Let's pray.

(House Prayer was said)

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

(The Lord's Prayer was said)

Mr. Speaker: Pray be seated.

(Sound of Gavel)

Mr. Speaker: Parliament now convenes. Proceed.

Deputy Clerk: Item 3 – Oath of Allegiance or Affirmation of a new Member.

Item 4 –Confirmation of Minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes of the proceedings of a Sitting of the House of Representatives, held at Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's, on Thursday, 25th April, 2024 at 9 a.m., be taken as read.

Question put and agreed to.

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***Minutes
Announcements***

Minutes taken as read.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes of the proceedings of a Sitting of the House of Representatives, held at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's, on Thursday, 25th April, 2024, at 9 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: Thank you very much. I wish to inform this Honourable House that the Honourable MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique will be joining us shortly. He is on his way from home, and so he will be joining us very shortly. I am informed that he is on his way to Parliament today.

For the year 2024, so far, the following Bills were passed and received the assent from the Governor-General:

1. Road Traffic (Amendment) Act, 2024;
2. Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amendment) Act, 2024;
3. Firearms (Amendment) Act, 2024; and
4. Electronic Communications Act, 2024.

Those were passed by both Houses and have received the assent from the Governor General.

Since we last met in this Honourable House, I attended the meeting of

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***Announcements
Questions***

ParlAmericas in Paraguay and I wish to inform this House that the Speaker of the House of Representatives in Grenada was elected to serve as First Vice President of the ParlAmericas and a Member of the Board of Directors of the Parliament of the Americas.

(Applause)

Finally, we are supposed to have from the Order Paper two days of Sitting, the 4th and the 5th. I am saying to this Honourable House that we will run the business of the House today and if it is possible that we get through all the Bills, we will get through them today. There is a stipulated time of 6:00 p.m., when the normal business of Parliament should end. So, it is my hope that we can progress nicely and not have to return to the House tomorrow for another Sitting. Those are my announcements.

Deputy Clerk: Item 7 – Presentation of Petitions.

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

Item 9 – Unopposed Private Business.

Item 10 – Questions.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of His Majesty's Opposition.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I was not here. I was unavoidably absent from the last Sitting. I noticed that the answers to the questions were given. I just have a couple of supplementary questions and some comments on question eight.

The question asked, and if I may read it. Mr. Speaker, it says, "Did the Government of Grenada through the National Organising Committee pay or sponsor flights and accommodation for persons in the Diaspora to come home for the independence celebrations? If so, please provide a list of the names, destination and cost associated with the accommodation and travel for each individual".

The answer given was, "This is not in keeping with the current administrative

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Questions

process practice". Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I clearly do not understand what this entails because I thought this was a question of the resources of the country that have been expended on individuals and therefore information related to that activity. I don't know how it is not in keeping with administrative practices. It's my understanding of this comment. First of all, I do not understand the comment. So, I need an explanation from the Minister responsible, and I add further that I expect these answers should be given because they are in keeping with the responsibility, the accountability and transparency which this Government has pledged to uphold on a consistent basis.

So, I beg your indulgence of the Minister for Finance to explain what is meant by this and then also whether he is expected to provide this data at a later proceeding.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable MP, Leader of His Majesty's Opposition, is that your only comment?

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Question eight, also, the last one. Question nine. Sorry...

Mr. Speaker: Question nine?

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

Mr. Speaker: I would like you to comment on both. So... If he has to respond...

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

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: The question was, "What was the cost paid for marketing and sponsorship for the celebrations?" The answer was...

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Mr. Speaker: ...that's eight, not nine.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: It's nine on my...

Mr. Speaker: It's looking different from mine, I don't know.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: ...well maybe... I have a paper from the Parliament...

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: More than one was sent, so let me read. "What were the costs paid for marketing and sponsorship for the celebrations?" The answer given was, "The 50th Anniversary Celebration is a yearlong celebration. The cost for marketing and sponsorship for the celebration is not yet finalised".

Mr. Speaker, if you contract someone to do a particular activity, that information should be available because a contract has to be given. The celebration doesn't have to be completed to obtain the cost because the person may not be able to start working unless he or she receives a contract that specifies how he or she will be paid and how much they will be paid. So I thought the answer was sort of not in keeping with the comment I made on the first question I raised, not in keeping with the practice of accountability and transparency, which this Government has pledged consistently to operate under.

So I expect that this question could be given at the appropriate time, if there was not enough time, Mr. Speaker, then I could understand. But to imply that it cannot be given until the whole year's celebration is completed, that beats me. Mr. Speaker, I expect some explanation to that effect. These are the two comments I have, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Patrick's East.

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Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, good morning to Members of this Honourable House. Let me first of all say the issue pertaining to this Administration paying for or sponsoring persons to come home for the independence celebration is definitely not a practice of my Administration. Therefore, from my knowledge, we have not paid for anybody's ticket or accommodation to come to the celebration. If that is a practice of the former administration, then I don't know, and I do not want to be basically associated with it. And, therefore, I will not want to comment further on this particular question.

On the issue of the cost associated with marketing, and so on. I have said already in this House that this is a year-long event. By giving you partial responses to activities that has already gone, I could do that, but at the end of the day if there is any changes to whatever actually happened in terms of the information given, I do not want to find myself in a situation putting my foot in my mouth then to give one figure then afterwards I have to go back and correct that figure. So, as I said before, I would wait until all the activities are completed before I can give an answer to the question that was asked.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Patrick's East. Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell: Yes, Mr. Speaker, very interesting. So it appears that the clarification, "not in keeping with current administrative practices"... That's the implications. "We are not used to doing this and that. We did not do it." I think it was easier to say that no expenditure has been accrued in such an initiative. That would have been better, but, of course, there are ways of finding out the truth. I happen to know differently based on people who spoke to me who received free tickets. So, I would follow up on this.

But, I can't understand, Mr. Speaker, my final point. The Minister implied that he has to wait. If a contract was given, it was given. Therefore, whether the person has to repay some money based on their lack of performance is another issue. So, then the

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***Questions
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expenditure could be adjusted accordingly by the end of the period. But to say that you can't give me because the event has not been completed, and you signed a contract and people were providing a service, it beats me. So, I still say, Mr. Speaker, I would expect an appropriate answer in due course for this.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to add before... I informed that I have to attend a funeral, which I am already late for. I can't afford to miss, so I will be back, Mr. Speaker, but I do have to leave here, Mr. Speaker. Okay?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. The Clerk did inform me this morning that you have to leave and return.

On the issue of the concerns of the Opposition Leader, I take the response from the MP from St. Patrick East, because sometimes in projects, you have incidentals and unforeseen costs that you have to factor in. But the Leader ask for the appropriate time and I am sure MP for St. Patrick East would give him at the appropriate time. Let's move on.

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

Item 12 – Statements by Ministers.

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

Hon. Delma Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and a pleasant good morning to everyone. Mr. Speaker, I rise to provide ministerial updates to this Honourable House on behalf of the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Religious Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, as the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Religious Affairs, we understand the importance of enhancing the performance of our staff. To this end, in recognition of International Nurses Day, we have given tokens of appreciation to our nurses and some of our doctors, honouring their invaluable contribution to our healthcare system.

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We have also launched a quarterly award ceremony to highlight the work of our mental health workers, both on the mainland and in Carriacou. We thank the business community for their support of gift cards and members in the diaspora who have given tremendous contributions towards assisting our staff.

We also appeal to other members of the business community and others in the diaspora to continue to give generously to our nurses, our social workers and other members of staff who deal with the issue of Mental Health. Those would not only provide a showcase of their dedication, Mr. Speaker, but also assist in their own mental health.

Mr. Speaker, we also have mental health training for first responders, nurses and police officers. Last week we had two days in St. George's in the stadium. Yesterday we started in St. Andrew, and this will conclude today. This training is conducted in collaboration with the Health Promotion Unit of the Ministry of Health to educate nurses and police officers on the signs and symptoms of common mental illnesses and to provide practical training on how to effectively address situations involving mentally ill persons.

Mr. Speaker, as part of our wellness programme, we looked at the nutrition aspect. Last Friday, we had a drive-through in collaboration with the Grenada Food and Nutrition Council. The aim of the drive-through was to increase public awareness of the food-based dietary guidelines for Grenada and to create awareness about practising a healthy lifestyle. And so as we traverse the entire mainland we stopped at locations where we saw groups of people and locations where there was schools and so and provided, not only promotional material, but we also had quizzes, Mr. Speaker, and we gave some small gifts some small token that will aim to improve the health of our people.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Religious Affairs aims at dealing with the whole of our individuals across our tri-island state. And so, while we just launched the nutrition aspect, our active body aspect in terms of exercise and the rest, and all that will be launched sometime later on in July.

We also have mental health training for faith-based organisations. This training will be launched next week on Tuesday. It is in collaboration with the Grenada Diaspora Advisory Council and will be done virtually, and approximately 30 persons have shown

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interest in participating. The topics that would be covered are as follows:

- Wellness – Focus on identifying the different types of stress and their impact on physical and mental health, and developing effective coping management strategies;
- Trauma and substance abuse – Overview of the most common types of trauma, substance abuse and the associated symptoms. It will also focus on therapeutic intervention to address these disorders;
- Suicide prevention – To educate participants on suicide warning signs as well as how to respond and refer to professional help; and
- Mood disorder – To provide an overview of psychiatric conditions that can cause significant changes in a person's emotional state.

Mr. Speaker, we appreciate that faith-based organisations interact with the community, and so we are hoping that this training would give them the knowledge, the skills and the correct attitude to transfer it to their members.

Training in schools, Mr. Speaker. On July 3rd, a three-day workshop is being planned for the following secondary schools:

- Boca Secondary;
- The Grenada Boys Secondary School;
- Wesley College;
- St. Joseph's Convent, Grenville;
- St. Andrew's Anglican Secondary School;
- Grenville Secondary; and
- The Grenada Christian Academy.

The training would focus on three main topics: drug and alcohol avoidance, conflict resolution and stress management.

Mr. Speaker, as a Ministry, we continue to work on mental health, we continue to work on wellness, and we continue to work with the faith-based organisation, understanding that they have a role in assisting us as we strive to deal differently with the issue of mental health and wellness in Grenada. I thank you. **(Applause)**

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Statements by Ministers

Bills: Firearms (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2024

Bills: Criminal Procedure Code (Amendment) Bill, 2024

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North West. You may proceed.

Deputy Clerk: Item 13 – Personal Explanations.

Item 14 – Motions.

Item 15 –Bills.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the first reading of a Bill shortly entitled, Firearms (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2024.

Clerk: A Bill which seeks to amend the Firearms Act, Chapter 105 (the "principal Act") to increase the penalties in respect of the commission of all firearm-related offences under the principal Act, shortly entitled, Firearms (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for its first reading a Bill shortly entitled, Criminal Procedure Code (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Clerk: A Bill which seeks to amend the Criminal Procedure Code, Chapter 72B (the "principal Code") to extend the categories of offences in respect of which a Magistrate shall not admit a person to bail to include offences under the Firearms Act, Chapter 105 which are punishable by imprisonment for a term of five years or more, shortly entitled, Criminal Procedure Code (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

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Bills: Education (Amendment) Bill, 2024

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for its first reading a Bill shortly entitled, Education (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Clerk: A Bill which seeks to amend the Education Act, Chapter 86 (the "principal Act") to increase the compulsory school age for children from 16 years to 17 years inclusive, shortly entitled, Education (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I believe I omitted to say that for the first reading and continuing stages. Notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the relevant Standing Order be set aside to enable this Bill, the Education (Amendment) Bill, 2024, to go through all of 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. Mr. Speaker, this Bill contains two clauses. Very concise and to the point.

(Inaudible comment by Mr. Speaker)

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

Question proposed.

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Bills: Education (Amendment) Bill, 2024

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this Bill contains two clauses. Clause 1 seeks to provide for the short title for the Bill, and clause 1 (2) speaks to the effective date by which the Bill is expected to come into force or to be effective, and that day, Mr. Speaker, is on the 1st of September, 2024. That's this year.

Clause 2, Mr. Speaker, seeks to amend the definition of compulsory school age. Presently, the definition speaks of the compulsory age of 16. This Bill amends the principal Act by redefining "compulsory school age" to move it to age 17 inclusive. Which means, a child ought to remain in school until he or she attains age 18. That's compulsory, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill we believe is important because it sets the foundation to start to address some critical issues that confront us in our growing economy, in our developing islands. Mr. Speaker, as a Government, we campaigned on the principle of good governance. We campaigned speaking of the development of our young people, our youths and one of the elements that spoke to the development, Mr. Speaker, treated with that of skill training.

And so, Mr. Speaker, our Government is setting the platform to implement skill training throughout our system, guaranteeing that every child who leaves the school system will have at least a skill. That, Mr. Speaker, we believe is important because those skills will, of course, develop into passions and those passions, if followed well and managed well, can result in people developing wonderful and prosperous careers, businesses and other dreams.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the issue of ensuring that our children leaving school are well-rounded is a critical component to ensure the future prosperity of Grenada. And so, Mr. Speaker, we recognise that there have been a number of children abandoning school, abandoning learning, liming on the blocks, not making a contribution to nation building, and not having a skill, but if they are equipped, Mr. Speaker, they can be used to make a contribution, and that is the essence. So, this is the first step, Mr. Speaker. We believe

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in transitioning into an environment where our children will attain a skill before leaving the school system.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is critical. This is critical as we position ourselves for the next 24 years of how we can transform our country. We need all hands on deck. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, this Government will do all in its power to ensure that skill training happens throughout the length and breadth of our beautiful island. Our children, whether they are moving along the academic lines, they too will also be well-rounded and well-prepared to face the world of work.

Because one of the cries that we've had in our society, Mr. Speaker, is that many of our youths, on completing their education, are not well enough prepared to face the world of work, and so you find employers looking outside of Grenada for very simple things. So we need to, Mr. Speaker, as a Government, put policies in place and pass the relevant legislation like this to guarantee a future for our young people.

So, Mr. Speaker, with this I commend the Bill for discussion and I ask our Honourable Members of this House to support this initiative in increasing the school age for our children so they can remain in school, build strong careers and prepare for either higher education and, subsequently, the world of work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Applause)

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Leader of Government's Business. Is it MP for St. George North East?

Hon. Ron Redhead: Good morning, and thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by acknowledging the fact that the Government of Grenada continues to make good on its promise to Grenadians both at home and abroad for improvements to the education system. **(Applause)**

In this particular instance, Mr. Speaker, the improvement is centred around the amendment which we just heard from the Leader of Government's Business seeks to amend the principal Act, Chapter 86, to increase the compulsory school age for children

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from 16 to 17.

I rise in full support of this amendment because, Mr. Speaker, like many other progressive legislations that this Administration brought to this Honourable House, it is again aimed and centred around people's development, which is something good, that is the core or essence of any Bill that is brought forward. And we are confident that this amendment will go far because this amendment will aid, in our belief and based on the data, in our students becoming better at adapting to the transition of a world of work or higher levels of education because of the opportunity now created to bridge this gap that exists in our current system from 16 to 18.

That is a gap, Mr. Speaker, that historically was left undone and has led to a large number of youth, primarily our young men, becoming susceptible to negative influences such as crime and other idle activities. That gap, now as we speak, as you heard from the Leader of Government's Business, will be filled with the reintroduction, potentially, of sixth form and the question of skills training. So, once that age is moved, once everybody agrees that is a possibility that you can see.

So it's important that we connect the dots with policy and also legislation as to why we must bridge this gap, Mr. Speaker, because you cannot work in Grenada at the age of 16. So the question is, why are you required based on law to leave school at 16? It just does not make sense. So you have two years, essentially, if you did not perform well in the school system that you will be vulnerable and susceptible to the environment of negativity.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is a contradiction in our view and which ultimately leads to this dilemma between education and the jobs that young people have to face today. This concern, Mr. Speaker, or dilemma, is the question of this systemic youth unemployment situation that is created as a result. If you did not perform well in school and you are age 16 and it's compulsory for you to exit, you are almost left in the wind and again exposed to the elements of negativity.

So the policy of the Government, Mr. Speaker, is linked to this amendment because it will mean that we will begin the shift away from just having to do these ad hoc

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youth training programmes that are a result of a broken education system. Youth development is not about programmes and all these things about programmes and programmes. It is, Mr. Speaker, about how we build the institutions that are sustainable, that can guarantee our young men and women a serious future in the advancement of their education, and not having to rely on these ad hoc programmes, which largely do not solve many problems but help to create new ones. So we will now be able to focus on strengthening the institutions with the ability to empower the young people before they leave school, not after. It has to be before.

So further increasing, Mr. Speaker, the compulsory age in school has the potential also to improve, as you heard mention from the Leader of Government's Business, the quality of the students who exit. There is a positive relationship in terms of if you have more time to hone your skill and your craft in education, you can become a much stronger student when you exit and ultimately a more productive citizen. So that is the vision essentially behind this amendment.

So, while there may be young students who, no doubt, are doing excellent at the age of 16, this amendment will not take away from their performance, but it is meant to capture those who are falling by the wayside and finding difficulty to transition to a world of work or higher learning too early.

So, the policy recently adopted by Government, Mr. Speaker, where no child is left behind, and this just doesn't mean up, up and out, but it means that you don't have to struggle to remain in the school system any longer than you're comfortable, but there will now be mechanisms which affords you the opportunity to come up. So you heard about skills training. So the intention of this amendment is not just in an abstract manner, but is meant to zero in on some of these root causes of our students and their performance in the Caribbean region.

And I want to take this opportunity to raise some concerns about the fact that Agriculture is something that is being questioned at the level of CXC, in terms of its continuation. Because, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about skills, the importance of skills goes far beyond just talking about it. It means, therefore, from a Caribbean or regional

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standpoint, we need to have the skills that our young people need to guarantee a sustainable future. Therefore, any institution that we have, whether local or regional, must be able to build in that framework, which is going to help those who are not so academically inclined to be able to continue to pursue their education.

So I want to take this opportunity to raise some concerns there and to say again that this amendment ultimately is about seeing how we take care of the young men and women who are unable to transition at too early an age. So it is not meant to take away from those who are performing well at 16. There are some wonderful students, Mr. Speaker, who do well at age 16 through the current system, but this now would afford us the opportunity to revise the education curriculum, to re-strategise and come much better to take care of a wider pool of students ultimately which will help benefit our country; Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

So, Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I again echo my support for this amendment, and I look forward to its implementation. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, MP for St. George North East. Is it MP for St. Andrew North East?

Hon. Kate Lewis-Peters: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to give a contribution on this Bill, the Education (Amendment) Act, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, we are here proposing to increase the compulsory school age from 16 to 17 beginning, in the next few months, September 1, 2024. And I'm here asking myself, within those next few months, what miracles our nation's children or the school system is expected to undergo so that those things can happen?

The reason purported here for these changes is to introduce skills training into the school system. I am assuming the secondary school system. It is my knowledge that skills training has always been intertwined in the school's system. We can speak about electronics, technical drawing, building technology, clothing and textiles, food and nutrition, just to name a few skills that have been intertwined into the school system for

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many, many years. So, introducing a few more skills, I assume, how will that curb all the problems that our young people face, that our students face, by remaining in school one year longer? This Bill will not correct the issues that is found in the school system, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, if you want to increase the school age, it means more resources have to be added to make all of the changes we are speaking about here. I haven't heard anything about additional resources for the school system.

The last time a Bill was passed here to make a change in the school system, I'm understanding that the results right now are a disaster. Maybe rather than coming here to make all these ad hoc changes to say we have fulfilled our campaign promises, maybe it is important to assess the impact of those that have been passed before to see if it is really improving those that it has been targeted at.

This must be done, Mr. Speaker, because we cannot just come here to say we are passing Bills based on our campaign promises. We know the challenges of the school system. We know that overnight, you cannot see the changes. What about the personnel within the system? How have they been engaged to be prepared for this change? These are the questions we need to ask ourselves.

So, to come here and make it look like we will be introducing skills throughout the school system for the first time and this will solve all the problems that our young people face so they will no longer have unemployment issues because they coming out with a skill and they would be passionate about it and they will find a job or they will be self-employed. This is not reality, Mr. Speaker. I believe that before we just come here and say nice words, it's important to have a basic understanding of how these systems operate first, before we can make these changes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. Andrew North East. I notice the light of the MP for St. Andrew South East. The floor is now yours.

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Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to follow the MP for St. Andrew North East, Honourable Kate Lewis and to make my contribution as it relates to the Bill that has been presented to this House.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is more than just changing numbers, moving from 16 to 18 or moving from 16 to 17, as she would have indicated; there are a lot more that need to be considered. And this has been presented as a change that is concise and to the point. Mr. Speaker, I wish to note that it is not as concise and to the point. This is a very major move that is being made, and I have to say that I am not going to oppose anything, absolutely nothing that is in the interest of the development of the education sector as a standard policy.

However, when changes are to be made, major significant changes, Mr. Speaker, there ought to be some depth. Right? I listened to the presentation, and in my opinion, I expected a lot more in terms of the content. I know that is not the Minister for Education, I accept that and I expect that we would have something more detailed coming that would make one feel comfortable, Mr. Speaker, that moving forward with this change as was indicated before would be for the better and that we are going to be able see significant improvement as it relates to this.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to flag and make the point about the importance of consultation. No significant consultation has been held with key stakeholders on this issue. So, whether we are talking about principals, teachers, parents, education officials, managers of boards, Mr. Speaker, there has not been consultation on this. And I believe this is mistake number one. This initiative, Mr. Speaker, requires all stakeholders to be on board.

But not just to be on board, Mr. Speaker, understanding what is to be done is significant because this has implications. But a very important group of stakeholders is that of students, Mr. Speaker. So, right around the country, we should have already been engaging students on this significant change. When we think about mental health, we ought to be thinking about the students who left primary school some years ago, went into form one, two, three, four, with the expectation that they are leaving after form five.

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Mr. Speaker, we can't just drop this on them. As a matter of fact, most of them, if not all of them, would be hearing this right now for the very first time.

So, before bringing this, Mr. Speaker, I would have expected the unions, students, and all of our key stakeholders to have been engaged and to be supportive of this once they would have received sufficient information as it relates to this significant change.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, there has been no presentation, whether publicly or here in this House, of any long-term strategic plan to guide this decision. This is a major decision, and I am not saying that I don't support it, but I am saying one must support this guided by something substantial, something detailed, **(applause)** something that shows a path.

What are we going to achieve exactly? What are the specific achievements that we are working towards in year one and year two? Of course, year one is going to have a lot of challenges, so what are we catering for? What are we seeking to achieve after year one? So are the expected measurable outcome of this amendment?

There must be a plan. And I would have expected a Bill like this would have come with a detailed plan, if not to be presented by the presenter, but presented here so that we can follow, so that we can read. Mr. Speaker, this requires in depth analysis not just in terms of the decision but the timeframe, is there an implementation plan that is going to guide and I don't have to ask this. There is no implementation plan already done, no feasibility assessment done that guides this decision, so I am not asking. I know for sure, there isn't. I am saying that the very content of this must be guided by that.

Mr. Speaker, my second view on this is that keeping students beyond the current age should be carefully examined, and as I said before, how it's rolled out is going to be significant. What are the decisions prior to this announcement that should have been...action that should have been taken?

Mr. Speaker, the current Education Act says that a child can stay in secondary school up to the age of 20. As a matter of fact, it's specific to say that if that child is born before July, they don't need permission, they can stay up till 20. If a child is born after July, they can stay up till 20, but they need permission. So the Act caters for students all the way up to 20 years beyond given the proposed.

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Mr. Speaker, I humbly submit this morning that we could look at serious motivational strategies and incentives as opposed to adjusting the compulsory age, making it mandatory where we can support students even beyond 18 to continue. There are different ways that this can be done, so I heard about a sixth form. Mr. Speaker, proposing a sixth form, we know the existing challenges, not just the issue of space, the issue of human resources and others. Mr. Speaker, so I am asking myself are there other methodologies that could have been adapted as opposed to just the amendment of the compulsory school age, as opposed to just legislation?

One might argue, Mr. Speaker, that after students leave school, how do you get them to, but I am also going to say this, Mr. Speaker. Another way we can look at this is to actually establish minimum requirements for early graduation. So, if we set what the minimum requirements are, and I totally 100% support every child leaving school with a skill, I totally, absolutely support this. So, Mr. Speaker, we can establish the minimum attainment per child so that if I achieve the minimum attainment requirements by 16 I could move on. So that is why I am saying, Mr. Speaker, maybe if there is more consultation on this just maybe we may get a method, an approach that could achieve the same result maybe implementing it slightly differently. Right?

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that I want to make note of is that there have been models of this before, where exceptions can be made with parental consent or clauses that allow for graduation by students who manage to complete all of these requirements by 16. So, Mr. Speaker, those considerations were not part of the presentation this morning and I wish to humbly suggest that those can be considered.

The other thing that needs to be seriously considered, Mr. Speaker, is that while there are wide bodies of research on the issue of increasing the compulsory age for education, some research shows that this has immediate short-term and long-term positive benefits. But, Mr. Speaker, they are substantial research that shows otherwise.

So, the issue of crime in school, there is research that points to the correlation between increasing the compulsory school age, and violence in schools, school drop-outs, Mr. Speaker, and these are real issues that need to be considered. Mr. Speaker,

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and that is why I am hoping that significant consultation could be held on this particularly engaging those who are involved in education.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of skills training, and this was presented as the key reason why this is being done, and this concerns me even more, Mr. Speaker, because I believe that every child in secondary school could acquire a skill before leaving secondary school if the minimum age is kept. Mr. Speaker, that is where curriculum reform comes in.

Mr. Speaker, a serious decision was taken, consultation started, a consultant was already approached on this and, Mr. Speaker, to date, I have not heard anything as it relates to the... I am not saying it has to be the same consultant or anything but, Mr. Speaker, I believe we are losing crucial time as it relates to the whole issue of curriculum reform. So I wish to strongly recommend that we can look to curriculum reform as a serious vehicle for achieving the very said objectives that were pointed out before.

Mr. Speaker, when we speak about skills training and all of that, again the Minimum National Qualification Framework, Mr. Speaker, significant. So when we speak TVET and skills training and we say we serious, Mr. Speaker, there are some fundamentals. So, significant work was done on the National Qualification Framework. As a matter of fact, external agencies were involved. Mr. Speaker, between 2022 and now I have not heard a word on this, I am not saying a word was not said but, Mr. Speaker, I would like to see us roll this out with urgency in the context of what was said.

The issue of more flexible learning pathways. Mr. Speaker, that Grenada Christian Academy was identified as the model school for this. Can you begin to pursue seriously the issue of the same skills as early as form two? Mr. Speaker, when we look at the flexibility of learning pathways, we have to see the correlation to this that we are discussing now and it doesn't necessarily mean that one has to stay an additional year.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make the appeal this morning that we move forward with urgency. If you look at the model of the new The Grenada Christian Academy School, the design of that school, and the vision for that school, you would see that it fits squarely within the context of that new look as it relates to pathways that are available to

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students.

Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about what I consider to be the unnecessary delays that are taking place on this project. As was indicated before when we left in 2022, Mr. Speaker, this project probably had one item, one major item outstanding and, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that two years later we are still struggling to get these moving models.

Expansion of the TVET Programme in secondary schools. Mr. Speaker, the piloting of TVET in secondary schools, as I said before outside of the regular programme, Mr. Speaker, four schools were piloted and were part of the pilot project. TVET, CVQ... Acquiring a CVQ before one leaves secondary school, Mr. Speaker, this was absolutely in place.

Mr. Speaker, if we investigate this programme, there has been a backwards step in that regard. The question is, where are those schools right now? We invested in equipment, we invested in resources and we invested in training. The question is, where are we right now two years later? I'm saying let us go back and expand because I would support anything that's going to be an improvement, but let us not go backwards. Right?

Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of establishment of Centres for Excellence and I made the point here before. Centres for Excellence don't have to be new buildings that we construct. So the Centres for Excellence was an agreed concept years ago that has been agreed at the regional level. And we moved forward on the basis, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to use existing schools. So SAASS was appointed as a Centre for Excellence. Construction workers were going there after work and I support the principle that schools must be open day and night.

So people were going from work to school earning a CVQ. Westerhall Secondary School was another centre. So, construction and other skills were being taught at those centres. The students in school acquired the skills during the day and people who were not in school got to acquire them after school. Mr. Speaker, as I said before I believe incentives and systems can be established to support and to expand and to encourage development in those areas.

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And as I said I want to repeat, I am not going to argue 16, 17 and 18. I'm not going to argue that. I'm just saying, have we done a thorough analysis of this to determine what would give the best results? **(Sound of the time bell)** So, if the best result, Mr. Speaker, is moving it to 18. The best result is strengthening the structure, putting your systems in place, and new incentives in place, Mr. Speaker, I would say we move ahead with that.

Mr. Speaker, can I have two minutes just to wrap this up? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: We have a lot of Bills to do today so I can't give you two minutes, I give you one minute.

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the final thing I'll mention here is pushing ahead with skills training and TVET requires the implementation of the TVET policy. Mr. Speaker, at the end of, well, the middle of 2022, the TVET policy with external support as well was approved, and I'm saying between then and now, I'm concerned about the rate of implementation.

So, Mr. Speaker, I close by saying, a number of initiatives must be considered. I support any move that is going to improve the development of our students, the expansion and development of programmes in education, and the development of the education system. But, we have to be thinking through with depth. We have to be analysing. We have to engage stakeholders so that we get the best results at the end of the day. It's not just doing for doing sake and so I would love to see a very expensive plan, detailed plan, strategic plan that really guides the rollout of this and it's going to have my support.
(Applause)

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Prime Minister.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the Bill presented by the Leader of Government's Business. I also want to take the opportunity to particularly, in relation to the Former Minister for Education and MP for St.

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Andrew South East, thank her for her valuable contributions to debate on the Bill all of which I think are quite valid and worthy of consideration.

I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, for us to distinguish between operationalising and legislating. We are here to obviously legislate and the Leader of Government's Business made it clear that the Bill is succinct, but our education system is not. It is expensive. It is intricate. It is complex, and it is never a never-ending process to improve it. So no doubt having had the years of experience in this field her presentation clearly demonstrates that she appreciates that.

But, Mr. Speaker if you want to build a house you first have to acquire the land. You can talk about the great house you want to build with a swimming pool, how many rooms, the colour, etcetera, etcetera, but you have to have the land first. And so this is just, in essence, a foundational piece and adjusting it to a wider construct of how we deal with education in Grenada.

So, Mr. Speaker, let us just talk about some of the nuances we have in our education system as it relates to youth, and that's the starting point. And the MP for St. Andrew South East is correct that the current Education Act, in fact, does allow for a young person to voluntarily remain in the education system at least until 20. But what we are dealing with and what is succinct is the compulsory education age. The age by which we are saying you ought to remain, you ought not to be given a chance to say I am exiting the education system.

And I want to distinguish between exiting the education system and secondary schools because it seems as if the notion somehow is that education ends with secondary school, and that's part of the challenge in the approach to the education system that we have. So when we say, we're expecting that miracles will happen because there are students right now who are expecting to exit the "education system", because they will be turning 16. That, we are saying, is a fundamental injustice for our young people because we are setting them up almost to fail.

Now, the Minister for Education will give more specific statistics, but let's take what I understand to be rough numbers. I am told about 1,800 young people exit secondary

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school every year, give or take around 16, an average 16-year-old soon to turn 17 years old. He is existing secondary school. If he says he does not want to do any further "schooling" under the current law I can't do anything about it, I can't legally say to him you need to remain in school.

But at 16 what is he going to do if he decides I'm not going to school and the law cannot force me to go to school? Under the Education Act if an employer takes him as an employee the employer is required to have what is called a "Young Registers Act" because it recognises that at 16 you are not an adult. And so special arrangements will have to be made in relation to you between 16 and 17. You can't vote, you can't drive, and you can't create civil, legal obligations. So, strictly speaking, you can't be hired because employment is a legal agreement, i.e., a contract.

Let's operationalise this. If 1,800 leave school and TAMCC takes maybe 1,000, NEWLO takes 400, what happens to the next 400 because the law says we can't keep them in school? It doesn't give us an opportunity to continue to help that 400.

So we are not here debating whether or not you could remain in the education system until 20. In fact, I would like to see our people remain in the education system permanently because education is about lifelong learning. And you don't exit university unless you are really a miracle brain in truth, until you are 23 or 25, and then if you go on to do your Master's, until your late 20s or 30s or 40s, or your PhD. I think everyone knows that statistically, across the world, there is a general relationship between higher education, or more education, or the more time you spend in the education system, and your income ability.

And that's what we are seeking to begin to address. This is not the cure for the many challenges we face. It is the beginning of putting in place one of the architectural frameworks that we need to address to make sure that we don't have a significant gap because 400 is significant, and if you do 400 by five, every five years, 2,000, and that is what is happening. And it is that oftentimes 2,000 who exit secondary school can't afford TAMCC or can't get to TAMCC, can't afford NEWLO or can't get to NEWLO, who exit the system, and then we recognise every five years we have 2,500 young people that we

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need to deal with, and hence the IMANI and hence the this, hence the that, it's an ad hoc approach.

So we are saying, we have to begin to address it by ensuring we give them the opportunity to remain in school, and we didn't say secondary school, in the education system, so that we give them access to education. And it is not going to be, I agree, a one-shoes-fit-all. It may mean expanding the capacity of TAMCC, expanding the capacity of NEWLO taking all of the various, I would call them suppliers of TVET Education, right now, and working on a comprehensive framework to start with so that they can begin to be the ones who help us provide these services to these young person who otherwise because there's no legal obligation to continue educating them or more importantly for them to remain in school could opt out and would likely opt-out to their own detriment.

And all of the statistics shown, Mr. Speaker, in Grenada, that the poorest group of people, those with the highest rate of unemployment, are those who spend the least time in the education system, and that's an incontrovertible fact. And so even if it is six months longer, one year later, you are significantly increasing the opportunities to save and improve and inspire and encourage another young person to be a better version of themselves. So whether it is skills training, whether it is life skills, one of the things we need to address... And the MP for St. Andrew North West and the Minister for Mental Health talked about those things. It is an opportunity, even if it's one year more, to deal with things like life skills, conflict negotiation, and emotional intelligence.

A lot of the things that... Because we are concerned with certifications, certifications, certifications and whether you get 14 or 15 or 16 or 17 CXC's, but then you have a conflict with a fellow student, and you don't have the skill set to talk it through to resolve it.

So I agree that Technical Vocational Education, in particular, should not be trying to save you after you've spent five years struggling with academic education. And I know the Minister for Education in the Minister for Education are quite keen to get us to the point where from a very early age the opportunity to start streaming based on the passion of the students, their abilities, their skill set and being able to identify that so that we won't

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put our students who may be creatives through 15 years of trying to turn them into an academic, frustrates them then we label them as being troublesome or miserable or what have you, and then when you get to 17 or 18 years, after 16 years of treating them a certain way, we now trying desperately to save them. So I absolutely agree that that has to happen and happens with some alacrity, and that the implementation of that requires all hands on deck.

But, I want to point out that as early as May of last year, the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture began the TVET Expansion Programme in primary schools. It was launched at the Woburn Methodist School. Let me repeat that. As early as May last year, the TVET Expansion, Technical Vocational Education, was launched in primary schools, starting with Woburn Methodist.

And therefore, it is clear, that perhaps the Minister for Education isn't and his PR Team, I think that might be a valid criticism, needs to be more forceful and more direct in communicating what is taking place and that may be a valid criticism which we accept and I will certainly convey to it.

But the fact that it started in primary school is a clear recognition that we need to start introducing the TVET in primary schools, not in secondary schools, because if the children are not exposed to it from primary school or in some cases, reintroduced to it, as when I was in primary school, they were teaching Woodwork. Right?

So you see, Mr. Speaker, we walked away from a lot of the things we presided over. We presided over the race to certification. We had the opportunity to make the compulsory education age 18. We had the opportunity to mainline or mainstream TVET education and make it mandatory across all primary schools. So, Mr. Speaker, yes, this is one fundamental step towards beginning to reshape our education system. I say this with all honesty.

The comments, including the need for more consultation, more public dialogue and more engagement, are absolutely valid, and we take that on board. And I'm also grateful for the fact that there was no non-support. There might be support, but there was no non-support, so there seems to be a neutral line. Right? **(Applause)** So even if it's neutral,

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I'm valid for it. So I accept that the education system is all of us, and therefore, we need to work together to support that.

I have certainly noted some of the studies, etcetera, that the learned MP has pointed to. I'm sure the Minister and his team are aware of it, but perhaps for our purposes, we, too, are happy to be better educated on them. But I know, based on the amount of work that the Minister and his team have been doing at the Ministry of Education, that they are very committed to rolling out, and it will take time. The actual implementation, not just the plan. The actual implementation to begin to ensure that we mainstream technical and vocational education throughout the system and not as a second-class category, but on the same frontal as other aspects of education, and that includes, Mr. Speaker, things like music.

In 2022, upon assuming office, only one Grenadian student did music at the CXC level. Only one. We can't be serious about education and music and the creative arts, and we are not encouraging our students to do a subject like music. I mean, we can't be serious in the Caribbean if people don't want to keep Agricultural Science, which is essentially food production, as a body of knowledge that we should be encouraging our students to pursue.

So, Mr. Speaker, the critical mischief that this amendment seeks to address is ensuring that we don't continue to encourage our young men and women to think, one, that education needs to stop at high school, two, that we don't continue disadvantaging them by putting them in no man's land. They are not adults, they cannot legally work really, almost borderline child labour, not given them the opportunity to continue their education and I'm saying compulsory so.

Because at 18 you are not an adult and there's no point in putting you out into a system where you are not equipped or ready for the world of work and the challenges that will come with that. You can't vote. You can't drive. We intend to harmonise the law that also says you can't marry until you are 18. You know you can marry at 16 with consent, Mr. Speaker? Right? That's part of the harmonisation.

So to some extent, this is also part of the harmonisation of ensuring that we are

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consistent in terms of when we begin to allow an individual to create legal relations. And so even under the Employment Act we believe we will have to bring amendments to ensure that it is clear that if you are engaging in work, there is reference to it there already, under the of 16 it should be training, right and not legal employment and so that we don't leave any loopholes for exploitation of 16 or 17 or 15 year old children.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I wish to support the Bill. I can assure the public that the Minister will present from an operations point of view, a lot of what is happening at the Ministry to treat this. But as we know, Mr. Speaker, there is a famous saying, "You have to sharpen the axe before you cut down the tree". You can't come with a dull axe and spend all day cutting the tree and then people pass and say, "Boy the man working hard", and then you pass this year and the tree didn't fall and next year the tree has fallen.

So sometimes you have to stay in the dark, make people feel you are not doing anything, sharpen the axe and then when you come you have quick implementation of the tree. **(Applause)** So on that note, Mr. Speaker, I again wish to commend the Bill to Members. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister and now I give the floor to MP for St. Mark.

Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I am mindful that we do have a lot of Bills to pass and I am mindful that we do not want to return tomorrow **(laughter)**, Wednesday, so I shall, Mr. Speaker, I shall be very brief. But I didn't plan to say anything on this Bill. But, after listening to some of the presentations, I must confess that I'm a bit confused, and I'm especially, after listening to the eloquence of the Honourable Prime Minister and Member for St. David, a little bit more confused.

Because I listened to the presentations on "This Side" and I thought that while we didn't have any non-support, I think this is very correct, I, too, support the change, but I felt that the cart was running away before the horse. And I am concerned about this, this is a serious "House of Business" and yes, we can sharpen the axe, but the axe can stay

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right there on the ground and not fell the tree. So we have to be careful of that. We have to have a plan. What would you cut down the tree for? And you know... What will you do with it when it falls? Do you have plans to ensure that the tree doesn't fall and damage somebody? Are there plans to... Because there are ways to do it. I can't do it, but I've seen it done. There are ways, and I think the pathway... We have to be assured, we, in this Honourable House, and the public, that there is a plan for this 17.

Because somebody who is 16 years old wakes up one morning and says, "Well, this is my last, no, I'm going back another year, but what am I going back to do"? What is the Ministry offering me? So even though they're youths and they're young these are the people that we have confidence in and the "Other Side" always talk about youths and young people and we have shown, we have demonstrated and we on "This Side" that we have confidence in them, but they must they must be engaged.

And then the very administrators, the people who are going to carry it out, have not been engaged. Whichever, I don't know if it's boards, I don't know the teachers, they have not been engaged. So, how come you have a plan and you have not engaged the people who are in the field, who may, and there are many times when the people in the field know more than we Ministers, they know more. So I don't understand how or why they have not been engaged. So I want to bend the "Other Side" not to seek to justify not engaging people, it is essential. Because otherwise then you have to come back and redo and redo and redo when it could have been properly prepared.

So I just want to state a couple things here, one, I do not feel confident that we have a plan ready and I am concerned that the very people that we want to save and we want to serve they do not know the plan and the very administrators of the plan, implementers of the plan do not know. And I want to beg that perhaps between now and the next Sitting, we can see something because we are not the authors, but we have an interest in the educational development of this nation. And therefore, I want to side with the Members on "This Side" for what they have said let us not take it as non-support or disagreeing or so on, but let us put it in a chronological order that we can all understand, one, that we can all support 100% and we can see it bloom and blossom.

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We don't care if Grenada develops under "This Side" or the "Other Side" or whichever; we care about this country. And therefore, the comments on "This Side", I want to beg that they be taken seriously and that they be put into good use. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Philip Telesford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to first and foremost express deep appreciation to all Members of this Honourable for their contribution to this Bill. Of course... We represented it as very straightforward and simple but a lot has come out of it and we want to ensure this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, that the comments that was made from "Both Sides" of this House will be taken on board and that we really want to thank the Members for their contribution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Education (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

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

Question put and agreed to.

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at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's***

***Bills: Education (Amendment) Bill, 2024
Bills: Customs (Amendment) Bill, 2024***

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 was passed without amendment. Leader of Government's Business.

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

Question put and agreed to.

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.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Education (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for first reading a Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Customs (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

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Clerk: A Bill which seeks to amend the Customs Act, 2015 to enhance the integrated legislative framework to combat money-laundering and terrorism financing, shortly entitled, Customs (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the relevant Standing Orders of this House be suspended to enable the Bill to be taken through its stages at this Sitting.

Question put and agreed to.

Relevant Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the second reading of the Bill.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, this Bill contains five clauses. Clause 1 provides for the short title. Clause 2 provides for the amendment of section 47 to insert new subsections to mandate that the Comptroller of Customs file a Suspicious Activity Report where a person imports or attempts to import goods in a manner that is different from the declaration or intended to deceive the customs officer in contravention of section 47 (3). The Suspicious Activity Report would be filed with the Financial Intelligence Unit, which receives all Suspicious Activity Reports filed under all legislation.

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A person who imports or causes to be –

1. Conceal a container holding goods in a different description or;
2. Packed in a manner appearing to be intended to deceive a customs officer, or;
3. Directly or indirectly imports or causes to be imported or entered goods found, whether before or after delivery, not to correspond with the entry made in respect of them,

Commits an offence, and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding EC\$100,000 or equivalent to three times the value of the goods, whichever is greater, and the consignment shall be forfeited.

The objective of this Bill seeks to amend the Customs Act, 2015, to enhance the integrated legislative framework to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, in conjunction with the Financial Intelligence Unit and the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism Financing Commission.

Clause 3 provides for the amendment of section 52 (1) to remove the exemption of baggage accompanying passengers from the requirement to declare exports under section 52. Currently, while section 52 of the Customs Act 2015 empowers the Comptroller of Customs to mandate the declaration of exports, section 52 creates an exemption for the passengers' accompanied baggage.

Section 52 (1) of the principal Act reads, "Subject to section 53, the exporter of goods, other than passengers' accompanied baggage, shall register with the Customs Computerised System, the Comptroller or a proper officer an export entry declaration in respect of those goods –

- (a) In such form and manner and containing such particulars as may be prescribed;
and
- (b) Within such time as may be prescribed, or such further time as the Comptroller may allow".

Amendment of section 52 of the principal Act. Section 52 (1) of the principal Act is amended by deleting "other than passengers' accompanied baggage" where it appears.

Clause 4 provides for the amendment of section 94 to insert two new subsections,

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to provide for the Comptroller of Customs to maintain records of transactions under the Customs Act, 2015 for a minimum of five years. These provisions would also apply to electronic records.

Amendment to section 94 of the principal Act. It is amended by inserting after subsection (4) the following new subsections –

The Comptroller shall retain, or cause to be retained, the record obtained or created as a result of each transaction made pursuant to this Act, for a minimum of five years from the date the record is obtained or created. Where the record is retained, obtained or created electronically, the record shall be retained in an electronically readable format for the period under subsection (5).

Clause five provides for the amendment of section 176 to insert two new subsections (4) and (5) to mandate that the Comptroller of Customs file a Suspicious Activity Report where a person makes a false declaration in contravention of section 176 (1). The Suspicious Activity Report would be filed with the Financial Intelligence Unit, which receives all Suspicious Activity Reports filed under all legislation. Additionally, the Comptroller of Customs in Grenada would be required to notify the Comptroller of Customs in the country of importation.

Amendment to section 176 of the principal Act, section 176 of the principal Act is amended by inserting after subsection (3) the following new subsections—

- (1) Where a person contravenes sub-section (1), the Comptroller or a proper officer shall immediately file a Suspicious Activity Report with the Financial Intelligence Unit; and
- (2) Without prejudice to section 9 (6), where a person contravenes subsection (1) in respect of goods being exported, the Comptroller or a proper officer may notify the Comptroller of Customs in the country of importation, or the relevant authority in accordance with the laws of that country, of the particulars of the contravention.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment seeks to give credence to the Financial Crimes Unit, as well as, the Comptroller of Customs to keep records of all transactions whether

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electronically or otherwise for a period of five years and to ensure that those transactions can be used as evidence if there is a breach in the law. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think it's something that will help our country proceed along a disciplined pathway in terms of ensuring that we are in compliance with the Terrorist Financing and Anti-Money Laundering Act. And with this, Mr. Speaker, I would like to rest my case on this matter.

(Applause)

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

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the amendment to the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, we perhaps would appreciate that in addition to the Customs (Amendment) Bill, there are four other Bills; the Friendly Societies (Amendment) Bill; the Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill; and the Exchange Control (Amendment) Bill, all of which are, in essence, being amended to strengthen the legislative framework treating with minimising the risk associated with persons laundering money or money converted into other assets, as well as, ensuring that there is transparency in relation to membership, ownership or participation in certain institutions within Grenada.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, there's an ongoing evaluation that occurs in relation to countries' legal, judicial and supervisory framework when it pertains to combating money laundering, anti-terrorism financing and the like. So these amendments are particularly in relation to the Customs (Amendment) Act, Mr. Speaker. It is designed to extend the scope of institutions or Government departments that are required to file Suspicious Activity Reports.

So it's quite common for banks, law firms, real estate agents, etcetera, to have been mandated to do so in circumstances where it may appear that there may not be appropriate explanations for the transactions. In the case of the Customs Department, it is simply extending that obligation to the Customs Department to be able to file Suspicious Activity Reports. There's also the requirement to keep records, including electronic

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records, for a set period. Although there was an existing obligation to keep records, it does not mandate the number of years for which it should be kept, so this brings some certainty to that aspect of the record-keeping arrangement for the Customs Department.

So, Mr. Speaker, I certainly lend support to the amendment. We do have some, in a sense, international-regional obligations that we are required to comply with and to demonstrate that Grenada is continuously engaging in best practices when it comes to addressing things like Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing. Thank you.

(Applause)

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

Hon. Emmalin Pierre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this Bill that has been presented. And as was indicated by previous speakers, there are many obligations regionally and internationally that Grenada has to satisfy, and Grenada has to follow. And so, Mr. Speaker, we must recognise the significant work that has been done in this area. and, of course, we support legislation to strengthen the existing legislation and to map the way forward to ensure that we're following and we're complying.

Mr. Speaker, two observations on this, and I want to make reference to the first one, which is section 176. Mr. Speaker, this amendment mandates the Comptroller of Customs to share information. Right? And this is something I have known for years, Mr. Speaker, has been an issue and continues to be an issue, whether it's agencies locally, originally or internationally. Mr. Speaker, in this case, we're specifically speaking to exporting countries.

And so, generally, while those are often covered under bilateral and other relationships and arrangements, the mutual agreements that we have, the whole issue and ensuring reciprocity is a concern and continues to be a concern. And I just want to flag this, Mr. Speaker, whatever can be done to encourage. So while yes, you know we normally very abiding in this way by supplying very often, the concern would be that others

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are not sharing, so we share and we don't get even locally, you know, interagency locally.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I want to recommend as we go forward we encourage the exchange of information and develop the kind of relationships externally that would facilitate and ensure that reciprocity is actually observed and that people are collaborating in a way because it could become a bit frustrating for local agencies whether Customs, FIU or otherwise that you share but when you need information it doesn't come back in the manner.

And then the second observation, Mr. Speaker, I flagged here is section 94. Mr. Speaker, this amendment basically says that the Comptroller is allowed to hold records and as was specified now, not that it wasn't there before, but specifying the length of time. Mr. Speaker, while the law allows a person to access a copy of the record, many persons, and again I'm flagging this just as an observation, many persons would highlight the challenge that they do have when they do accounts, right, when they do other business with other Government departments where they are required to submit original copies.

Now, I'm looking at the section and the clause here specifically it does not use the word "original", and so that is where my observation is as to whether this is going to continue to be a challenge where people would be required to use their original copy otherwise and they do not have access to it or is it a case where copies, validated copies, are held and so consumers, customers, traders are allowed to have their original copies for use whether it's for interaction or meeting the requirements of Government departments or for doing business in general.

So those two observations, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I support this bill.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. Andrew South-East.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry. MP for St. Patrick East, I invite you to close.

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Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, thank you and since the debate on this particular Bill was quick and rather simple, I would take the opportunity to thank Members of the Honourable House for contributing to it and to ensure that we can pass this legislation at this point in time so that we can further strengthen our Anti-Money Laundering Bill, as well as, the Terrorist Financing Act that exist. With that, I would like to say thank you to everybody who has contributed.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. Patrick East.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Customs (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House resolves itself into a Committee of the whole House to consider the Bill, Clause by Clause or Part by Part.

Question put and agreed to.

House in Committee.

House resumes.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Just hold, just hold. Honourable Members, I have to report that the Bill was considered by a Committee of the whole House and was passed without amendment. MP for St. Patrick East.

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Bills: Friendly Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024

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

Question put and agreed to.

Chairman's Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the third reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act shortly entitled, Customs (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and good morning, everybody. I beg to introduce for first reading a Bill for an Act shortly entitled, the Friendly Societies Bill, 2024.

Clerk: A Bill which seeks to amend the Friendly Societies Act, CAP. 118, to mandate that the register kept by friendly societies be made available to the public, shortly entitled, Friendly Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: 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

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this Sitting.

Question put and agreed to.

Relevant Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the second reading of the Bill.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as indicated earlier, this Bill is one of the many Bills taken to the House this morning in connection with our Anti-Money Laundering or Countering the Financing of Terrorism and legislative framework. Mr. Speaker, this Bill has the following objective. It seeks to amend the Friendly Societies Act, Cap. 118 (“the principal Act”) and it contains two clauses, and its objective is to amend section 10 (1) of the principal Act to mandate that the register kept by friendly societies be made available to the public.

Mr. Speaker, so as regards the amendment of section 10 of the principal Act, it is amended by inserting before the words “in such form” the words “which shall be available to the public”. And it will now read, “Section 10 – General duties and powers of Authority. “The Authority shall keep a register, of all Societies registered under this Act, which shall be available to the public, in such form as may be approved by the Minister, and shall discharge all the duties required of him or her by this Act and regulations made thereunder”.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to point to the framework in which

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this Bill is being presented and the importance of these regulations and these amendments for the efficient functioning of our economic system and, in particular, of our financial system. I want to begin, Mr. Speaker, by saying that any economy can be divided into two broad sectors, you have what is called the real sector, and you also have what is called the financial sector.

So the real sector comprises those sectors that produce a final product. So agriculture, manufacturing, and construction. They are the real sector. The financial sector is the sector that provides, I should say, the finances, the money that the real sector needs to grow and expand.

The financial sector, Mr. Speaker, are of two broad kinds. You have what is called the commercial banks, as we know them, not the central bank. It doesn't form part of it. The commercial bank, as we have it in Grenada. But we also have what is called the non-bank financial sector, which includes the credit unions, the friendly societies, and all the other deposit-taking non-bank financial institutions.

As we know it, Mr. Speaker, commercial banks are regulated by the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the non-banks are regulated by what is called the Grenada Authority for the Regulation of Financial Institutions (GARFIN).

And the regulation... Before I talk about the regulation, I just want to make the point because there is a very close linkage between the financial sector and the real sector. So, the real sector, to grow and expand to invest, gets its money from the financial sector. So, if the financial sector is not cooperating well, the economy, in fact, can be seriously affected. So activities in the financial sector can, in fact, have a contagious nature.

Now, many years ago, when an economy fell, it was mainly because of activities in the real sector. So you have, for example, commodity prices, export commodity prices falling, and that would affect the economy. Nowadays, it is realised that many of the problems that may confront an economy may well start in the financial sector and hence the need to have the financial sector properly regulated and properly controlled.

Now, it has been observed over the years that terrorists and so on have been using

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our financial sector to carry out their activities. They are placing the financial sector, if not regulated properly, they can be used to conduct those activities, and hence there is a need for us to exercise full control of our financial sector and make sure that our financial institutions are used for what it is supposed to be used for.

Money laundering, for example, can take place through our financial sector. But, money laundering is not a safe means for any financial institution because when the money comes in, it goes out immediately, and therefore you cannot use it for any real financial transaction, give loans and so on.

So, as part of our international financial arrangement, Mr. Speaker, in 2013, the Proceeds of Crime Act was established and out of that came the Anti-Money Laundering or Countering the Financing of Terrorism, and with it, the Commission was established. And that Commission reports to the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, and in July of 2022, the Commission prepared and presented a report on Grenada, and it found that Grenada was, in fact, lacking in around 23 different areas. Hence, the need for us to take action to control our financial system. As the word says, we were non-compliant in 23 areas, and therefore, the Ministry of Finance and the Cabinet took the decision to address those deficiencies within our financial system. And hence the reason why we have around 12 different pieces of legislation. About nine Bills have to be, have to be presented to correct.

So those that we are presenting this morning are only part of the gamut of Bills that we have to present to correct our system. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, this Bill, which is extremely important, ensures that information in the friendly societies has to be available to all who want it so we can get a true sense of what is happening within our financial sector and to avoid any form of anti-money laundering, any form of terrorist financing taking place by using our financial institutions. So I commit this Bill for the consideration of this House, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, MP for St. Andrew South West. All right. It's very unusual that the guy who opens the batting closes the innings. But I invite you, MP, to

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close.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Yes, “servant”, if you’re batting, you have to bat well.
(Laughter)

Hon. Lennox Andrews: So, I want to say that the response suggests that, you know, everybody is familiar, understood and that, you know, is in full support of this Bill. So, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Friendly Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House resolves itself into a Committee of the whole House to consider the Bill, Clause by Clause or Part by Part.

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. MP for St. Andrew South West.

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***Bills: Friendly Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024
Bills: Co-operatives Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024***

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

Question put and agreed to.

Chairman's Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the third reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Friendly Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for first reading, a Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, the Co-operatives Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Clerk: A Bill which seeks to amend the Co-operative Society Act, Cap. 66A to secure the obligation of every Co-operatives Society, to make specified documents available to the public, shortly entitled, Co-operatives Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew's South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: 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.

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Question put and agreed to.

Relevant Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the second reading of the Bill.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to amend the Co-operative Societies Act, Cap. 66A (“the principal Act”). This Bill contains two clauses and its objective is to insert a new section 22 (3) to secure the obligation of every co-operative society to make specified documents available to the public.

Mr. Speaker, section 22 (2) of the principal Act empowers members of a co-operative society, their agents and their legal representatives to examine records for documents listed under section 21 (2) (a) to (h) at normal business hours of the co-operative societies. However, there is no comparable provision for any documents to be examined by a member of the public, whereas the public comprises potential future members and other persons with an indirect interest in the affairs of co-operative societies.

Accordingly, the new section 22 (3) seeks to confer on members of the public the right to examine the following documents of a co-operative society:

- (1) the register of members – provided for under section 21 (2) (c) of the principal Act;
- (2) copies of all notices of directors and notices of change of directors – provided for under section 21 (2) (e) of the principal Act;

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(3) a register of its directors setting out the names, addresses and occupations of all persons who are, or have been directors of the co-operative society, with the dates on which each person became or ceased to be a director – provided for under section 21 (2) (f) of the principal Act.

Mr. Speaker, I now present this Bill for the consideration of the House. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Members, apparently, the pattern is now set. No further debate on this particular Bill. So I invite the presenter to close.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: So, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the silence signifies consent. So, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's move on.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Co-operatives Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House resolves itself into a Committee of the whole House to consider the Bill, Clause by Clause.

Question put and agreed to.

House in Committee

House resumes

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Mr. Speaker: Honourable Members, I have to report that the Bill was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment. MP for St. Andrew South West.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Chairman's Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Andrew South West.

Hon. Lennox Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the third reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Co-operatives Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

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

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen): Good morning, Honourable Members. We now move to the next Bill, the Exchange Control Bill. Honourable MP for St. George South East. Sorry Members. I was advised that it was the Honourable Leader of Government's Business. Has that changed?

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have been charged to introduce the following Bill...

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Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen): Member for St. Patrick East, you're welcome.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Yes. Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to introduce for the first reading, a Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, the Exchange Control (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Clerk: A Bill to amend the Exchange of Control Act, Cap. 93, to enhance the integrated legislative framework to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, shortly entitled, Exchange Control (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Madam Deputy 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.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen): Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move the second reading of this Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill contains three clauses. Clause 1 provides for the short title. Clause 2 provides for the amendment of section 2 (1) to insert the definition of "import". The term "import" is used on at least 12 occasions in the principal Act. Clause 3 provides for the insertion of a new section 44 to create the obligation for the retention of records.

This Bill seeks to amend the Exchange of Control Act CAP. 93 ("the principal Act"). This Bill seeks to enhance the integrated legislative framework to combat money

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laundering and terrorism financing, by creating an obligation for the retention of records of transactions conducted under the principal Act.

Clause 2 provides for the amendment of section 2(1) to insert the definition, “import”, as was said before. The definition reads, “to take or cause to be taken into the State”. The term “import” is used on at least 12 occasions in the principal Act.

Amendment of section 2 of the principal Act. Section 2(1) of the principal Act is amended by inserting the appropriate alphabetical order the following new definition –

““import”, with its grammatical variations and cognate expressions, means it take or cause to be taken in to the State;”.

Clause 3 provides for the insertion of a new section 44 to create the obligation application for the state agencies that discharge functions under the principal Act, to retain records of matters under the Exchange Control Act for a minimum of five years. This new section would also apply to electronic records.

Insertion of new section 44 to principal Act. This principal Act is amended by inserting after section 43 the following new section –

Retention of Records.

The Permanent Secretary or the competent authority, as the case may be, shall retain each record obtained or created for the purposes of this Act, for a minimum period of five years from the date the record is obtained or created.

Where the Permanent Secretary or the competent authority retains a record electronically, the Permanent Secretary or the competent authority, as the case may be, shall retain the record in an electronically readable format for the period under subsection (1).”

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we have said earlier on, this particular Exchange Control (Amendment) Bill forms part of a series of Bills that needs to be basically be taken, or to be amended to ensure that we maintain the integrity of the money laundering activities, as well as the terrorist financing activities that is needed in the financial sector. Therefore, I take this opportunity to present to this Honourable House this Bill for debate.

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Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen): So, are there other Members who would like to make contributions at this time? Or are we following the trend set for the last two Bills? Member for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Madam Deputy Speaker, as again, as we indicated earlier on, this is a short Bill, and I think because of the other Bills that we have passed, prior to this particular one, we believe that the Bill itself is self-explanatory and I want to basically thank the Members of this House who see it fit, to not spend too much time trying to reinvent the wheel or to create additional debate on this matter. So, thank you very much. **(Applause)**

Madam Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, we have been remiss. The question is, I have to revert a little bit.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen): Member for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House resume and the Chairman's ...

Madam Deputy Speaker (Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen): Member for St. Patrick East, can we please repeat the request for Committee, and then we'll...

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House resolves itself into a Committee of the whole House, to consider the Bill Clause by Clause, Part by Part. I thought I said that before.

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Bills: Recording of Court Proceedings Bill, 2024***

Question put and agreed to.

House in Committee.

House resumes.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: So, just hold, hold Honourable MP. Hold please. Honourable Members, I have to report that the Bill was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendments. MP for St. Patrick East.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Chairman's Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: MP for St. Patrick East.

Hon. Dennis Cornwall: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the third reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Exchange Control (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move for its first reading, a Bill entitled the Recording of Court Proceedings Bill, 2024.

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Clerk: A Bill to provide for the recording and transcribing of court proceedings and for related matters, shortly entitled, Recording of Court Proceedings Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Relevant Standing Order suspended.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the second reading of the Bill.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Prime Minister.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And let me thank the Leader of Government's Business for giving me the opportunity to present the Bill. I guess he figures since I come from a background of rules, regulations, and law, **(laughter)**, not the public service **(laughter)**, that I should present.

Mr. Speaker, many of our citizens are astounded and shocked and amazed when they go to court, starting with the Magistrate's Court to see that the Honourable Peter David, when defending his client, and in the course of cross-examining the police officers who work hard to put criminals behind bars, when he will have to ask the question, and wait for the magistrate to write down the question and then wait some more for the witness to answer and for the magistrate to handwrite the question. And that situation is replicated throughout the judicial process in Grenada.

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So first of all, it makes the process exceedingly tedious, exceedingly slow. Then it's compounded by the fact that it may only be the magistrate or the judge who could read their handwriting. It's compounded by the fact that often times, as we call it, the notes of evidence or the court proceedings or the transcript, as we may say, are contained in the notebook that may get lost, that may get damaged, that sometimes the ink fades. And that is the basis upon which the official transcript or court proceedings are based.

In fact, there are countless examples (**laughter**) where you can't find the transcript. The case gets thrown out or the judge moves to another territory, and perhaps, in moving, the notes get misplaced, and as a result, there are significant delays, and sometimes injustice in the justice system.

You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that the Court of Appeal, in fact, set free a convicted murderer because, and I have to emphasise, he was convicted of murder. He wasn't innocent. He was found guilty by a jury of his peers, and because the transcript of the court proceedings could not be made available to him, due to this very ancient way of having to physically, manually write out all of the notes of evidence, when he launched his appeal against his conviction, because the transcript couldn't be provided, he couldn't prosecute his appeal. The Court of Appeal took the view that the failure to provide the transcript essentially amounted to denying the right to prosecute his appeal, and in those circumstances, released him from prison.

You know, I would reserve comments on whether that was the appropriate thing to do, but it shows how our failure to make sure that we implement the appropriate technology and the legislation to back the appropriate technology has significantly and negatively impacted the administration of justice, not just at the Criminal Bar, but at the Civil Bar.

At the Civil Bar, it's even worse. Oftentimes, these cases are about business, insurance, and personal injury, so the amount of note taking and the number of witnesses are even more. And in civil litigation, you write everything in advance, and so when you get there, there are piles and piles of paper, and then you have cross-examination on tons and tons of stuff, and sometimes these trials could go three, four, five weeks.

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Sometimes, criminal trials last a month, and the judges they're handwriting everything. And then the judge has to deliver a summary or a summation to the jury, which has to be handwritten out again or typed out, and then said to the jury and then recorded.

So, we have lagged behind in the OECS, particularly significantly in addressing this matter. And there's technology available to easily solve this. I mean, even now, you can talk to the computer, and it will type out what you are saying. So, that really is the purpose of the Bill. To bring us into modernity, when it comes to court transcription.

In places like the British Virgin Islands, which invested in this over a decade ago, they try some of the biggest and most valuable and most complex commercial litigation in the world, because many of the multinational companies are incorporated in the British Virgin Island and so, they've actually created a special commercial court division. They recognise that by having these companies incorporated there, when there are disputes all over the world, they actually come and try the cases in the British Virgin Islands.

It allowed their jurisprudence, their judiciary, their commercial court and as a result, as citizens to benefit enormously, because sometimes the courtroom is full of high-priced lawyers from all over the world, litigating about matters in Hong Kong, China, Russia, wherever. They come in. They stay at the hotels, restaurants etcetera, etcetera. They use local lawyers as part of the case, but all of that is because they invested in the necessary technology, and they invested in their court to make sure that the court could, in fact, deal with complex commercial matters.

So the mischief this is designed to solve, Mr. Speaker, is in fact that which I just described. And so, in terms of the details, it allows for a court and the appropriate court officer, whether it's the Chief Registrar, the Registrar or a Senior Magistrate, as the case may be, to have an electronic or digital recording of the court proceedings. It allows for someone to then, if necessary, to be able to then transcribe that digital or electronic recording and then to certify that it is an accurate record.

Now, particularly in the Magistrate's Court, Mr. Speaker, and particularly, things like preliminary inquiries, when a witness stands and gives his evidence and the magistrate handwrites all of that evidence, the practice is that the magistrate then reads

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that over to the witness. So if a witness testifies for two days, the magistrate would have had to handwrite all of that evidence, read it over to the witness, and the witness then has to sign and say yes, what I've said there is accurate. Or, if they're errors, the magistrate has to amend or correct those errors, initial it and then have the witness initial it as well, basically as the testimony of the witness.

So, again, you can understand how tedious and painful that exercise is. So, the current proposed Bill, Mr. Speaker, seeks to ensure that a witness doesn't have to confirm the accuracy of his evidence, because if you have an electronic record or video record, you would have heard everything he said, and then obviously there's no need for that. So, that's one of the changes that, and the improvements that it is introducing.

Mr. Speaker, obviously, it allows litigants and participants in the case to obtain a copy of the transcript at the appropriate fee. It also allows for the appropriate government officers, the DPP, AG's Office, etcetera, to also be able to have a copy of the transcript in their case without having to pay the fee.

So we expect, Mr. Speaker, the legislation has been encouraged and supported and is based on the St. Lucia model at the recommendation of the Chief Justice. As you're aware the OECS Supreme Court Headquarters is stationed in St. Lucia, and so we are really hoping that by having the legislation enacted, it's not just the legislation, we have to make sure that the technology is then put in place and the courts are properly resourced so that we would be a position to ensure that frankly participants in litigation, their attorneys should be able to have the transcript, frankly if not by the end of the day, by the next morning when they come, when they come to court.

So the risk or painful experience the victims of these convicted murderers would have had to go through ceases to exist. And then obviously, with digital and electronic recordings, you can have backups and so on, so that we don't have to come to that state.

So this is really long overdue. I've spent 20 years at the bar, and to a large extent, how I found it is how I left it before entering this side of public life. And we really hope that with the legislation in place and with the resourcing, we should be able to make this a thing of the past.

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And it should significantly improve the delivery of justice, because it should make for shorter trials, for quicker preparation of appeals both, at the Court of Appeal and if it needs to go to the Privy Council, to the Privy Council. And with shorter trials, quicker preparation of appeals, quicker availability of the transcript, it means, for example, a lawyer can sit with his client and discuss the transcript, and say to him, "Look, you don't have no appeal, let's end this here." But when you don't have the transcript, you can't even advise on whether **(laughter)** you could appeal or not. Right? And so the thing drops on and drags on, and it ties up valuable time that otherwise could be used for other cases.

So, I obviously would like Members to support the Bill, because I think we have to pay attention to the administration of justice. Justice delayed is usually justice denied, on both sides, whether it's victim or perpetrator in the case of criminal matters or in the case of civil matters, where you have litigants, whether it's land, whether it's personal injury matters, whether it's insurance matters, banking matters or just contractual disputes. We need to make sure that we can make the judicial system more efficient. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Prime Minister. Honourable MP for the Town of St. George.

Hon. Peter David: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to give absolute support to the Bill as presented by the Honourable Prime Minister. You know, hear justice delayed, justice denied, that's the note I had, but, you know, give a lawyer the mic and he must say something more. **(Laughter)** So that there are transcripts. **(Laughter)**

Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness, this is very welcome, because quite frankly, I think we need to pay tribute to the magistrates and judges, who have to write every word. I mean, the delays are enormous. You know, the magistrate has to ask, "What did you say again?" and write it down carefully. So it's... I want to say that this is going to be most

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welcome by all practitioners, criminal, civil, throughout our system.

You know, I practised in the US, and I know that at the end of the day, you're doing a criminal trial. At the end of the day, you could take the transcript, you pay, you get your transcript, you go home, you study it. So, the morning when you come back, you could cross-examine based on what you had. But in the system as it is, I mean even for the attorneys, you know, we have to be writing what they're saying, because we won't get a transcript, so we have to, rather than focusing on analysing what's being done, we have to write every word.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's nothing much I can say, just to support my colleague, who himself practised for many years, and to say that the implementation is important. Many times we pass the legislation, and there has been talk about this before. It's several years ago, they trained some people, there were some people... In fact, they have now retired from the system, the people who were trained many years ago to deal with the technology as it was then.

So I urge the Government to, as we say, this is going to be good both in commercial litigation and in criminal matters, and it's going to move the system along. The biggest complaint you get, the biggest complaint you get... In fact, I just saw my phone and I'm getting some complaints again, it's cases being adjourned and the delays throughout the system, and that can come through... And so, because of the slowness of the system, because one trial, I mean a simple, small trial that will take 10 minutes using this, will take an entire afternoon, because the magistrate has to be writing.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say, we on "This Side" have no difficulty, but the implementation is what is critical. And the Bar, I am sure, the President of the Bar and the entire Bar will do whatever it takes to assist the Government in getting this done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, we give this full support. **(Applause)**

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable MP for the Town of St George. I now invite the Honourable PM to close.

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Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm obviously grateful for the support for the Bill. And, yes, the implementation is going to be critical. I expect it ought not to be difficult because it's already been done in other islands, and I'm sure therefore, the recommended software, and as well as the equipment, and I'm sure the Attorney General at the Ministry of Legal Affairs will act expeditiously in making sure that our courts are resourced.

To some extent, there is some recording already taking place, but obviously we need to have the legislative backing to make sure that the transcript and so on is valid, and to see if there are actual improvements in the technology, which needs to happen to make sure that we can, as the MP for the Town of St. George has said, so that you actually get the transcript, the afternoon after the day's proceedings. So, thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, the Recording of Court Proceedings Bill, 2024.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I beg to...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Prime Minister.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I beg to move that the House resolves itself into a Committee of the whole House to consider the Bill, Clause by Clause.

Question put and agreed to.

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Adjournment***

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.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Prime Minister.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Chairman's Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Prime Minister.

Hon. Dickon Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the third reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, the Recording of Court Proceedings Bill, 2024.

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

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government's Business.

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Adjournment

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

Question put and agreed to.

The Sitting of the House of Representatives adjourned *sine die* at 12:04 p.m.

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