



GRENADA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

**SECOND SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**OFFICIAL REPORT**

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

TUESDAY 26TH MARCH, 2024

*The Sitting of the House of Representative  
held on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> March, 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 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, Agriculture & Lands, Forestry, Marine Resources and Cooperatives
Honourable Tevin Andrews, MP <i>(Carriacou &amp; 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
Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith C. Mitchell, PC, MP, JP <i>(St. George North-West)</i>	- Leader of His Majesty's Opposition
Honourable. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen, MP <i>(St. Mark)</i>	- Deputy Speaker
Honourable Peter David, MP <i>(Town of St. George)</i>	- Member
Honourable Kate Lewis-Peters, MP <i>(St. Andrew North-East)</i>	- Member
Honourable Emmalin Pierre, MP <i>(St. Andrew South-East)</i>	- Member

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***Attendance***

**ABSENT**

Honourable Philip A. Telesford, MP  
(*St. George South-East*)

- Minister for Health  
(*Excuse tendered*)

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**Prayers  
Minutes**

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Let's pray.

**(House Prayer was said)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Join me in saying the Lord's Prayer.

**(The Lord's Prayer was said)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Pray be seated.

**(Sound of gavel)**

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

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Morning, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it seems the Leader of Government's Business is unavoidably delayed. And so, with your leave, I seek to move the Motion for the confirmation of the Minutes of the proceedings of a Sitting of the House of Representatives, held at Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's, on Tuesday, 20th November 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. I invite you, Honourable PM, in the absence of the Leader of Government's Business, to also seek the acceptance that the Minutes be taken as read.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you.

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**Minutes**

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** I am grateful, Mr. Speaker. So I also move a Motion that the Minutes of the said meeting of the House of Representatives, held at Parliament Chamber, at Mt. Wheldale, St. George's on Tuesday the 26th of November 2023, be taken as read.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Minutes taken as read.**

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Minutes confirmed.**

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Yes. I move, Mr. Speaker, that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Sitting of the House of Representatives, held at Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's on Monday the 4th December 2023, as well as on Thursday the 7th and Friday the 8th December 2023, be taken as read.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Minutes taken as read.**

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**Minutes**

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move a Motion that the Minutes of the proceedings of a Sitting of the House of Representatives held at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's Monday the 4th December 2023, at 10 a.m., and on Thursday it is 7th and Friday the 8th December 2023 at 9:00 a.m., and on Monday the 11th December 2023 at 8:00 a.m., be confirmed.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Minutes confirmed.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move a Motion that the Minutes of the proceedings of a Special Joint Sitting of the Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament, held at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George on Tuesday, 6th February 2024, at 9:00 a.m., be taken as read.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Minutes taken as read.**

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, I ask to move...

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable PM, the mic is off.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move a Motion that the Minutes of the proceedings of a Special Joint Sitting of the Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament, held at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St.

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**Minutes  
Announcements**

George's on Tuesday, 6th February 2024, be confirmed.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Minutes confirmed.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable PM, the mic. All right.

**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 MP for St. George South East will be absent from today's Sitting as he is out of state on official business. And I was also informed that the MP for St. Mark would be... She was here earlier on, had an emergency and had to leave, but she hopes to be back with us.

Since our last Sitting, the Speaker, the Clerk and the President of the Senate were guests at the Westminster Parliament, where, I think, the 75th Anniversary of the Commonwealth was celebrated, and we had some very interesting engagements there in terms of Parliamentary procedures, Westminster style. In my view, it was a trip that was worth it, and the time was, in my view, well spent.

I also want to inform this Honourable House that I was informed that the constituency fund is finally sorted out. The sum of EC\$30,000 has been placed in the accounts of the MPs for the various constituencies. Because the sum is EC\$10,000 per month, and we have now come to the end of March, really, so that \$30,000 covers the first quarter of 2024.

Just like to say also that since our last sitting, the Governor-General has assented

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**Announcements**

**Presentation of Papers / Reports**

to the Appropriation Bill, 2023, and the Budget Loan Authorisation Bill, 2023. That was given the assent by the Governor-General.

And I wish to remind this Honourable House that Grenada stands host to this year's CARIFTA Games, and I want to encourage all of us as MPs to attend the games on the days we can and to give support to team Grenada, because when Grenada does well, we all feel good about it. Those are my announcements.

**Deputy Clerk:** Item 7 – Presentation of Petitions.

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

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** The mic.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Sorry, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The following Papers and Reports are laid before Parliament:

- The Grenada Investment and Development Corporation Annual Report 2022;
- The Financial Intelligence Unit Grenada Annual Report 2022;
- The Grenada Authority for the Regulation of Financial Institutions (GARFIN) – Report of the Supervisor of Insurance for the year ended 31st December 2022; and
- The Grenada Bureau of Standards – 2022 Annual Report.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. The abovementioned Papers are now laid in Parliament.

**Deputy Clerk:** Item 9 – Unopposed Private Business.

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**Questions**

Item 10 – Questions.

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

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, as I stand I just want to say that I'm happy to hear you speak to the fact that you went to Westminster and had an opportunity to sit and listen to the officers of the House so I assume that would aid in the further development of what **(laughter)** we see here at this House, Mr. Speaker. I'm wishing you the best, in fact, so I wanted to make that point.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, I stand to ask... But before I say this... Really, it was one question asked, it was just several parts, as you can see, they're all correlated. So really I just stand to ask the one question standing in my name, it's just several parts. It should have been a, b, c, d, e, f and so on, to the Honourable Minister for Finance. I just note that two parts were not allowed, but, Mr. Speaker, and I would speak about this, accordingly.

**Mr. Speaker:** So... Honourable Minister for Finance.

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to indicate that I have acknowledged receipt of those questions, lines, and subsections of those principal questions. I must also say that the National Organisation Committee was the community charged with undertaking the activities for the National Independence as well as the parish activities that are now ongoing.

Some of the questions I will not be able to answer some immediately because they will require that all the activities be conducted and an audited financial statement of the event would need to be put in place before I can give you an answer that is going to be authentic. Because I would not want to put my foot in my mouth at this point to make statements that are not factual because I don't have the data.

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However, I have communicated with the National Organisation Committee to provide me with most of the answers that are available at this point in time. So I will wait until I get a feedback from that organisation with the questions that I've given them so that I will be able to at least report to this Honourable House. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** All right. Thank you, Honourable Minister for Finance. But I want to urge that the answers to the question be provided by the committee to the Honourable Leader of His Majesty's Opposition before the next Sitting of this Parliament. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the Honourable Member, I understand the point that is being made, but if the Member looks carefully, the first question said, "What was the actual budget provided to the National Organisation Committee"? It didn't talk about... That portion didn't talk about what is spent and what is accounted for. It asked, "What is the budget that was provided"? And the Government and the ministry ought to have had that number. I mean, people can't get money without the initiative of the resources available to them.

So, Mr. Speaker, just to make a point like this one. There are other parts that could, of course, be answered too, but I just make a general point. I appreciate it if the Minister did not have all the information, then he could say it will be provided at a later date, that's okay with me because it's happened before in this House. But that question does not call for any auditing of reports.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Minister for Finance.

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** Mr. Speaker, with reference to the subsection, on the question that asked about the budget that was provided for the Independence. It's no secret because it's public information that sometime in September of last year, we came to the House with a Supplementary Estimate of EC\$7.5 million for the Carnival activities.

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We said that this was needed to provide for activities that would have actually been needed prior to the Independence itself. And again in this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, we did pass a budget that included the sum of EC\$15 million for the Independence celebration. If I should add both of them together, I think it works out to be about EC\$20.5 million.

However, I cannot tell you at this stage that that amount of money has been transferred to the National Organisation Committee, and therefore, I will wait until I get a response from the ministry and the committee as to what has transpired there. Okay? Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** All right. I understand. But, my position is that we try and provide the answers before the next Sitting of Parliament as far as it's possible. Honourable Minister, as far as possible.

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

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

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, I don't want to prolong this because I don't think it is necessary. I just really need to make the point. A Budget is a document passed in Parliament. It could be one thing, but it does not say what has been transferred to a particular organisation for a particular activity. And therefore, just referring me to what was passed in the Parliament and what was passed in the Finance Committee does not answer this question. So I just don't want... I will not continue this even if the Minister attempts to get up and make another explanation. I would not continue it, but I expect to get the answers to those questions as soon as possible.

**Mr. Speaker:** All right, thank you, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, and I don't want us to continue in that vein as well.

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**Personal Explanations**

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

Item 12 – Statements by Ministers.

Item 13 – Personal Explanations.

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I stand here on Personal Explanation in the context of me being the Parliamentary Representative in the constituency of North West, St. George and of course, the Leader of the Opposition and someone who sat in the Office of Prime Minister for 23 years.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of community and its development, as I know it historically, is related to the initiatives of the people in the constituency and, of course, the facilities available for the work of development of their community.

Mr. Speaker, there was a building in Happy Hill, St. George, that was long before available to the community, it was known there as the “Society Hall”, where cooperatives, people paid money on a monthly basis and got loans, that's how the community operated, then it became a community centre and then it was a pre-primary school. But, we have seen recently with the building of the new community centre at Beausejour, the building of a new primary school, which was being housed by the pre-primary school.

We've noticed with no discussion with the community and with the people involved, the building is being renovated, and I understand by Government with Government resources, and I understand the Senator responsible in this Government is claiming that he's doing it for his office. **(Laughter)** I don't know what office it is, whether it's an office for the Parliamentary Representative or whatever it is, could be, but this is a very strange phenomenon, and I've been asked questions.

So this is... I'm making the point here so the Government cannot say that they do not, they did not know. This is happening in the name of the Government, where people are doing things in communities against the fundamental wishes of the people, which can be problematic and cause problems of disorder, and therefore, I'm making the point as the Parliamentary Representative for that constituency, and it has been known for over

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40 years.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the playing field in Beausejour...

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable MP.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Leader of the Opposition. You're speaking under Personal...

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Yes, it is personal. It affects me personally.

**Mr. Speaker:** ... Explanation.

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Yes, as Parliamentary Representative, Mr. Speaker, that's my right. That is my right, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, and you have a right to stick to Personal Explanation.

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Yes, and that's what I am talking about, the playing field and the lack of ability of the community to use it appropriately, that affects me. Well, I don't understand. Mr. Speaker, after being here for 40 years, I don't know what affects me personally or not. That is a strange phenomenon. But why is it a problem?

Mr. Speaker, that field was initiated by the community with my help over the years and has been very useful in the development of all sporting activities in that community. And, Mr. Speaker, it is now reported that the people do not have the rights to that field, but the Ministry of Sports are going to be the ones dictating what happens there in that community.

So I raise it again for that particular information, that Government will not say that

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they did not know what is happening in that community and I'm clearly stated as the Parliamentary Representative and someone who has a history of understanding of what takes place there, I have a responsibility to report it to this Honourable House.

So if something happens and this situation continues, and something happens, I will not be held responsible. Those in Government will be held responsible. That is in my position, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition. Proceed. Honourable Leader, your light is still on.

**Deputy Clerk:** Item 14 – Motions.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move a Motion standing in the name of the Leader of Government's Business, who is unavoidably absent, and the resolution reads:

**RESOLUTION FOR THE PURPOSES OF SECTION 6 OF THE STAMP ACT,  
CAP. 309.**

**WHEREAS** it is provided by Section 6 of the Stamp Act, Chapter 309 (hereinafter referred to as "the Act") that the Minister may from time to time, by Order, amend the Schedule by increasing or decreasing the amount of, or by annulling, any of the duties therein mentioned, or impose duties on any instruments not mentioned in the Schedule, or alter the Schedule in such other manner as he or she may deem advisable: Provided that before any such Order shall come into operation it shall have been approved by both the House of Representatives and the Senate, by resolution;

**WHEREAS** the Minister proposes to amend the Schedule to the Act to revise the formula for calculating the stamp duty payable on Leases and Agreements for Lease so that where the annual rent is fixed, the stamp duty payable shall be 1.25% of the total rent reserved for the entire term of the Lease or Agreement for a Lease and where the annual

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rent fluctuates, the stamp duty payable shall be 1.25% of the total average annual rent reserved for the entire term of the Lease or Agreement for a Lease;

**AND WHEREAS** it is expedient that the Stamp (Amendment of Schedule) Order, 2024, which seeks to amend the Schedule to the Act, be approved by the House of Representatives and the Senate;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that pursuant to section 6 of the Act, the Stamp (Amendment of Schedule) Order, 2024, as set out in the Schedule to this Resolution, is hereby approved by the House of Representatives and the Senate.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Question proposed.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, the Resolution seeks to address the challenge of the calculation of stamp duty on leases and agreements for leases that currently exist under the Stamp Act, which is an ancient, maybe I should describe it as a convoluted methodology, that has created quite a bit of confusion at the Deeds and Land Registry and at the Inland Revenue Department where the stamp duties are collected on leases.

The current language in the Stamp Act and if I mean to say so, it's written in this way, the stamp duty to be paid on a lease or an agreement for a lease and it says, "Where the rent whether reserved yearly or otherwise is at a rate or average rate exceeding EC\$50 and not exceeding EC\$100, EC\$1.50; exceeding EC\$100 and not exceeding EC\$200, EC\$2.50; it goes on and on and on until it gets to exceeding EC\$700 and not exceeding EC\$1000, EC\$11; for each additional EC\$250 or part thereof, EC\$300; where consideration for the lease is of any kind whatsoever, EC\$5.50".

The net effect of this, Mr. Speaker, is that persons at the Deeds and Land Registry,

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where oftentimes the stamp duty is calculated or fixed before the stamps are affixed to the leases of agreements for leases or the attorneys or the business persons who are treating with renting properties or renting buildings. Oftentimes, their calculation, the calculation of the Deeds and Land Registry or even the calculation of the Inland Revenue, creates a completely different figure. And because we are dealing with percentages and fractions, oftentimes the rounding up and rounding down create all kinds of confusion that create delays and bottlenecks in the registration of leases and agreements for leases, and in fact, affect businesses negatively because of the delays.

So, Mr. Speaker, what this seeks to do in conjunction with the Inland Revenue, the Postal Corporation, and the Deeds and Land Registry is simply create a standard and a fixed rate for calculating the stamp duty. So when the annual rent is fixed, as in it does not fluctuate, then essentially the total of the rent paid over the duration of the lease, whether it's one year, two years, or three years as the case may be, is summed up and a 1.25% will be made applicable.

Where the rent fluctuates over the duration of the lease, then the average of the annual rent is taken, which is essentially a calculation of the total rent that fluctuates divided by the period of the lease, and you get the average annual rent, and a similar 1.25% is then to be applied.

The aim here, Mr. Speaker, is to simplify the process for calculating the stamp duty and to make it certain for both the Inland Revenue, for the Postal Corporation or the Deeds and Land Registry as well as the payer of the tax in the form of stamp duty so that both the landlord and the tenant and the attorneys are clear on the formula for calculating of the stamp duty.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is the mischief that the Resolution is seeking to address. The Act requires that such a resolution be brought before Parliament for affirmation, and we are seeking, Mr. Speaker, the support of the Members of the House for the amendment to the Schedule. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. Honourable Leader of His Majesty's Opposition.

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**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister clearly has a right to vary the rate of stamp duty, and in particular, things like the rents people pay or agree to. What is important is the impact of that change, so you're moving from a fixed rate, fixed amount to a percentage, and of course, one has to, each person who is renting has to now look at how this would affect the rent that he or she pays. So that rate will be applicable, as was already pointed out.

In the normal course of business, Mr. Speaker, that's what we have to be concerned about, for maybe a person who was just having a nominal rent that may not be a major issue, but in the case of businesses or persons doing major activities and have major rentals that calculation can yield quite a significant increase. In addition, the Member presenting the Bill and Prime Minister, who is a lawyer in the transaction of business, lawyer fees are based on the overall value-cost of this rental, and there is a negotiation for such rent.

It would mean that with every increase in that business, the business will certainly pass it on to the consumer; that's how businesses operate. So it could yield for a business that the consumers use in a general sense could see increases to the average consumer, and that's the reality. It is difficult to say what rental level that increase will be unless you look at the specific cost that is now being charged as opposed to the 1.25%.

So my point is to caution not to oppose, but to caution the Government about the initiative and in light of the present economic situation in the country and the fact that people are already feeling that economic pressure that one has to be careful that any further increases in things that people normally use that is passed on for obvious reasons that I pointed out one need to be careful. So this is not a question that is saying do or not do. It is saying, "Watch it".

Because if the person or finding out after this goes into effect that their rents are increased, the value of what they have to pay for a service is increased and the person who is in charge of the business is saying, well your Parliament passed, and I want to make it clear that I did urge Government to be careful so that I am not going to be included as one of the persons to be blamed for that particular decision.

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That's my point, it's a caution more than necessarily an opposition because I accepted the right of the Minister to vary the stamp tax as he sees fit, but to be careful about how it is done. Okay.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Member for St. Andrew South West.

**Hon. Lennox Andrews:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, everybody. Mr. Speaker, I stand to give support to the Resolution. And in doing so, Mr. Speaker, the fundamental point that is to be made is that, that new formula seeks to ensure that the calculation of the stamp duty is made simpler and easier to understand and easier to apply so that there would not be confusion and which, in fact, would lead to different numbers being achieved because the formula was not clear enough.

So, Mr. Speaker, I support the Resolution because it seeks to make that calculation, the formula is so much easier to understand, and it's easier to apply in cases where the lease is fixed and where the lease is variable. Good? And therefore, the point... While you may have a fixed value or a percentage, the point is that the calculation is what is made easy here. The calculation is what is made easy here. The calculation is what is made easy here, and I think that's the importance, and that's the value of the Resolution that is before us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Honourable MP for St. Andrew South West and now MP for St. Andrew South East

**Hon. Emmalin Pierre:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise not being certain whether I wish to associate myself with support for what has been presented and listening to the persons who would have shared before or spoken before the Honourable Member for St. David and St. Andrew South West, it leaves me even more concerned.

Mr. Speaker, I noted as the presentations were made that this new formula, this new formula of calculating the amount that is going to be due in duty, is going to make it

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simple, easier to understand, and easier to apply. Mr. Speaker, all that is great for the administrators.

And so I just want to take one minute, Mr. Speaker, to express the concern that while this is going to be easier for the administrators, I would have loved to hear what kind of impact this would have on other persons involved. Mr. Speaker, what kind of analysis was done to determine that the impact would not be in any way so severe that it justifies that we should do this because it's simpler to calculate, it would cause less confusion in the mind, and it will be easier to apply?

So this remains my major concern, quite similar to those raised by the Leader of His Majesty's Opposition. So I would want to see us go a little beyond just that it's easier to calculate, and it's easier to apply, and it's less confusing. How does this really affect people outside of those who administer this exercise? Thank you. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew South East. Honourable MP for St. Patrick East.

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again, I rise in full support of the Motion that is presented before us today. You know sometimes when you review certain legislation you realise that there may be ambiguity in it and the purpose here today is basically to minimise any ambiguity where this is concerned and to make sure that what is presented to our taxpayers is something that is understood by everyone, the lawyers, the customer themselves, and the person who is paying the tax so that at the end of the day you would have a fair and just and simple system.

This does not intend to basically increase the tax payable by the customer or the taxpayer in any way, form or feature because we are parting from the basis that if the total rent, be it from the calculation of a flexible rented lease or a fixed one, that figure remains what it is.

The 1.25% that is applicable against that fixed figure is what is important and again and again whereas before we had different percentages of numbers calculated on that

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basis we are saying now that having studied the figures and the analysis we have taken into consideration all of this and ensure that this application of this percentage does not make it honours for the taxpayer to pay.

So at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, this does not affect the taxpayer more than it should, and therefore I am fully supporting that Motion. Thank you. **(Applause)**

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

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I was too dispassionate about the Resolution when I spoke, Mr. Speaker. So let me go again.

Mr. Speaker, the current Stamp Act... And let me say this. This request to clarify the formula did not come from the Government, and it did not come from the Inland Revenue. It came from the people, the business community that are required to register the leases and pay stamp duty. And their request was when you take the Schedule, which is a long Schedule in the Stamp Act, and I started reading it out, I didn't wish to take the valuable time of this Honourable House by engaging in a laborious exercise of reading the several categories.

First EC\$50, EC\$1.50; the next EC\$50 to EC\$100, EC\$1.75, which you have to keep adding up. The next EC\$150 to EC\$200, EC\$2.00 all the way up to EC\$1000 and then in excess of EC\$1000, you then have to add. So you have to go back and add all of this. I'm saying that even in instances where the stamp duty is EC\$1.50 or EC\$2.50 or EC\$3.50 or any fraction thereof, because the rent may be for example it may say between EC\$75 and EC\$100 but the rent maybe EC\$90 or EC\$80 per month as the case might be and you now have to calculate this fraction.

So what has been happening, Mr. Speaker, is that the persons who are required to pay the stamp duty. They would go through this long Schedule and do their calculations, and they would either go purchase their stamps to affix to the lease or go to the registry to purchase the stamps. They would have done their calculations and having looked at this long schedule calculated it and they get a figure of EC\$400, when they get

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to the registry, the registry does its calcification and the registry is saying it's EC\$450 and they're both required to sit down there and go back and reconcile who's right, who rounded up or who rounded down etcetera, etcetera.

And in many instances, they can't agree, and so the business person can't proceed with their lease being registered. The tenant who wants the lease so that they can occupy the premises and conduct their business is in a stalemate, and you have this constant back and forth, and this matter has been going on for years.

And so the request was made from those who are impacted by this, the landlords, the tenants, the lawyers who act on behalf of landlords and tenants, and the business community to bring some clarity to the matter. And so all we said, instead of going through this laborious exercise, which ultimately equates to approximately between 1% and 1.5% when it is all added up in this very granular way, that it will be best to simplify the methodology for calculating the stamp duty. And so the impact it has on those persons is that they spend less time having to sit down and go through line by line the first EC\$100, the first EC\$150, the next EC\$200, the next EC\$250, etcetera.

It is a very simple formula. What is the total rent we will earn or have to pay, by 1.25%, and where the rent goes up or down based on whatever arrangements the landlord and the tenant have, is still 1.25% of the average annual rate. So this is merely meant to assist the business community, to assist the landlord and tenants and those who are treating with this matter to have certainty, to not waste their time to show up with \$10 and then the registry saying its EC\$10.50 or EC\$10.25 and then you have to go back and forth before the matter is resolved.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we are simply responding to the need to ensure that on matters like this, there is efficiency and the leases can be registered as quickly as possible. That's the intent of the impact, and that is something that, in fact, we are responding to based on the several requests that have been made at the Inland Revenue and elsewhere.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is not meant in any way, shape or form to have any severe, quite the contrary. It is ameliorating the bottlenecks and the delays that exist with the

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current methodology for calculating stamp duty. And since we are all Members of Parliament and ought to have access to the Laws of Grenada we can simply go and look at the current Stamp Act and you will see the extensive Schedule that is in the Stamp Act for calculating stamp duty which to a large extent is very archaic, done many, many, years ago and has this very pedantic approach to the calculating of the stamp duty. That's all we are seeking to do, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** All right, thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Motion approved.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move a Resolution standing in the name of the Leader of Government's Business.

**RESOLUTION FOR THE PURPOSES OF SECTION 108 (3) OF THE ROAD  
TRAFFIC ACT, CAP. 289A.**

**WHEREAS** it is provided by Section 108 (2) of the Road Traffic Act, Chapter 289A (hereinafter referred to as "the Act") that the Minister may by regulations amend, vary, suspend or revoke the provisions of the First Schedule;

**WHEREAS** it is further provided by Section 108 (3) of the Act that Regulations made under subsection (2) shall be subject to affirmative resolution;

**WHEREAS** the Minister proposes to amend the First Schedule to the Act to increase the existing annual motor vehicle license fees by \$50.00 across all vehicle types;

**AND WHEREAS** it is expedient that the Road Traffic (Amendment of First Schedule) Regulations, 2024, which seeks to amend the First Schedule to the Act, be approved by the House of Representatives;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that pursuant to section 108 (3) of the Act, the Road Traffic (Amendment of First Schedule) Regulations, 2024, as set out in the

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Schedule to this Resolution, is hereby approved by the House of Representatives.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Question proposed.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as announced in the Budget Presentation by the Honourable Member of Parliament for St. Patrick West and the Minister for Finance as part of the Appropriation debate we would have indicated, Mr. Speaker, that we will be seeking to come to Parliament to seek the affirmation of Parliament to support the increase of motor vehicle license fees by EC\$50 across all vehicle types.

Mr. Speaker, I know that we would appreciate that Grenada, over the last 20 years, particularly with the onset of used vehicles and particularly with the fact that vehicles have become cheaper and more accessible worldwide, has had a dramatic increase in the number of motor vehicles of all types across this spectrum on our roadways. Many of our roadways, Mr. Speaker, when originally constructed, were not meant for the volume, the size, or the capacity of many of the types of vehicles we have on our roadways today.

And perhaps from a transportation and infrastructure perspective, if we start with our port of entry, our seaport, our seaport itself was built for breakbulk cargo. In modern times, Mr. Speaker, since the Americans invented containerised shipping, the 40-foot and the 20-foot containers have become the norm for transporting goods by sea, and these containers and their chassis make their way onto our roadways.

And with the significant building development taking place in Grenada which has occurred over the last several years the increase in traffic just in terms of heavy vehicles, (the 40, the 20-foot containers, the heavy equipment that supports construction, the trucks, the number of buses that are now on the road, the taxis, the rental vehicles, the

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private vehicles that are on the road), Mr. Speaker, it's a tremendous amount of vehicles and to a large extent Grenada has already begun to experience gridlock in many of the more urbanised parts of the island.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the ability to maintain and repair our roads is under severe strain. Mr. Speaker, it is exacerbated by the fact that the Government, itself, has no asphalt or concrete plant and it has to rely extensively on private suppliers to be able to procure asphalt, to be able to procure a lot of the aggregates, notwithstanding that we have the Gravel and Concrete, and to develop a system that will assist with ready and on-demand maintenance of our roadways.

Mr. Speaker, the situation is also exacerbated by the fact that Grenada is subject to sometimes random and unpredictable weather patterns, which have devastating consequences on the road infrastructure. We can only recall in December the dramatic rainfall which occurred in the north, in the west and in the north-eastern parts of Grenada, which in a short period of time, led to dramatic destruction and undermining of the road infrastructure in the northern, north-eastern and western parts of the island. In fact, I think in St. Patrick alone, in excess of 100 landslides were recorded on that evening.

So, Mr. Speaker, it means that the state has to find resources to respond to these dramatic events when they happen, because they aren't planned for and no amount of budget could, in fact, determine the kind of destruction that they will bring and the kind of repair work that is required to deal with the repair as well as to improve and strengthening the sustainability of the road networks and the road infrastructure.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it has become necessary for us to ensure that we take prudent measures to ensure that we have the revenue necessary to treat the road infrastructure. And, Mr. Speaker, it is not just in the sense of the main roads, but Grenada is blessed with a large network of secondary roads and concrete roads. We have farm roads, all of which need to be addressed and maintained. And so the demand for the state to address those issues, Mr. Speaker, we expect is only going to increase, not decrease, given the number of vehicles that are on our roads. And so, Mr. Speaker, you would see that the EC\$50 increase in the motor vehicle license is across all vehicle types.

There's another aspect, Mr. Speaker, which is not directly related to roads, but

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certainly relates to the environment and motor vehicles as well, given the large number of motor vehicles that we have. Mr. Speaker, we have, as I think all of us would see when we drive around Grenada, as well as several hundred derelict vehicles, often parked on roadways, sideways, on private or public properties.

And again, it falls upon the state, and I want to commend the Minister for Mobilisation, Implementation and Transformation (**applause**) for the work that his Ministry has been doing, in seeking to clean up the number of derelict vehicles we have. Not only are they an eyesore, Mr. Speaker, but oftentimes they become a source where mosquitoes breed. And obviously, you can create significant health consequences for us.

So, Mr. Speaker, the ability to treat on a longer term, with how we manage the amount of vehicles on our roadway, the impact on traffic, on the quality of life, and the quality of the air, is something that we also have to address. But in the meantime, Mr. Speaker, obviously, when persons are on the road, they certainly want a road that affords them a comfortable ride to and from their destinations. And so, Mr. Speaker, we see this as a revenue-generating measure to assist us in better ensuring that we have the resources necessary to assist with road maintenance.

I want to speak a little, Mr. Speaker, on the steps that the Ministry of Infrastructure is taking to begin to address improved road maintenance, as well as ensuring that we have sustainable roads that can withstand both natural disasters and manmade disasters. Now, Mr. Speaker, as I said, this Administration inherited a Ministry of Infrastructure with very little capacity to do anything on its own. So I'll give an example. Mr. Speaker, right now, the way in which the road crews repair the roads, to a large extent, they have no control over it.

What happens now, Mr. Speaker, is that they wait for when hot mix is available from CCC Quarry. It is unpredictable. It is not planned, and the road crews are literally at the mercy of that quarry. So what happens, Mr. Speaker, is that the crews literally wait, and they get a call, and you're told a truck of asphalt is available. A truck. And invariably, you have 12 or so crews scattered around the island. And they have to make do with that

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one truck.

So when you see them on a Saturday or on a Sunday, repairing the road, Mr. Speaker, and oftentimes people, they complain about the limited amount of work they do. That's because that's the amount of asphalt they have. That's one. Two, they do not have the right equipment, Mr. Speaker. So invariably, what you see is the truck with the asphalt, a roller, the drums with the bitumen and the traditional brooms or other things that they use to put the tar and some sand.

They don't have cutters to cut the road, Mr. Speaker, to remove the asphalt that is already weakened, to scrape it, to roll and relay the foundation and then to redo the asphalt. So what has happened, Mr. Speaker, over several years, and unfortunately it's still happening, is that invariably we take asphalt and we just dump it on top of the asphalt and then we roll it. And so, the roads oftentimes get higher and higher and higher. And that is because we have not provided them with the proper equipment, Mr. Speaker, that is required to address the situation.

And all of the tools are rented. All of the tools are rented. From the small handheld tools to the heavy tools, to the excavators, to the tractors, etcetera, to the rollers. So rollers are rented, Mr. Speaker, per day, and they're used for half an hour, because the amount of asphalt you have is quite limited. And you only need the rollers when the asphalt is down, but you have to pay a daily rate, but you're not using the roller for a day. We can drive all around Grenada and see them parked up, waiting for work, because there is no work.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have to not build, procure equipment and build a system that allows us to properly maintain the roads. And oftentimes the road deteriorates. And we can take a good example, let's take the Calivigny main road. If you drive on it now, you'll see the signs that tell you the road needs to be maintained. You see the sign that tells you, you know there are some recurring potholes that need to be cut, the foundation needs to be addressed, and then the asphalt needs to be re-laid.

But, when you don't have the machine to cut the asphalt, Mr. Speaker, what happens is that the crew simply fills the hole up and rolls it, but the underlying condition has not been addressed, so when the rain comes, it will happen again.

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So, Mr. Speaker, we have, we are in process of devising a system that will allow us, first of all to increase our capacity to obtain asphalt, so that the crews that maintain our road, in fact have the materials they need to deploy, to engage the more extensive repairs and maintenance of our roads.

We have procured bitumen from Trinidad and Tobago, in partnership with the Chinese, who are at the airport currently, Mr. Speaker, who have a large asphalt plant. We've supplied the bitumen. We have procured many of the aggregates. We have procured the warmer, and we are going through the testing phase. And so, we expect once the appropriate tests are conducted in terms of the asphalt mix and quality that our crews will therefore have access to a lot more asphalt, in more predictable quantities, so that we can engage in more extensive road repair throughout the tri-island state of **(applause)** Petite Martinique, Carriacou and Grenada.

Mr. Speaker, currently, only one entity can supply asphalt on the island. And I've just said that the entity is not able to meet the demands for all kinds of varying reasons, of the state. And so, we are in discussions, Mr. Speaker, to see whether we can encourage other members of the private sector to engage in particularly the business of having an asphalt plant that can ensure that we have alternative supplies, for the supply of asphalt in Grenada, so that we can engage in the road maintenance.

Mr. Speaker, as you would also be aware, you know, many times the public expects the Government to be able to respond and respond within a certain time, particularly when you have natural disasters, particularly when you have community initiatives where small roads or so on are required to be opened and so on. And when you don't have any equipment at all, Mr. Speaker, it basically means you're again at the mercy of third parties you have to wait on, particularly when it comes to community initiatives and community development. Mr. Speaker, we can't allow this to continue.

And so, we are certainly going to be looking at procuring in small quantities, as appropriate equipment that would allow the ministries, particular Social and Community Development and so on, to be able to respond to the needs of the communities when it comes to opening small roads, clearing areas that are blocked, dealing with fallen trees

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etcetera, and so assisting our farmers on some of the farm roads and so on, and so that they have the necessary equipment that is required, to allows us to respond quicker on those issues.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, I want to simply wrap up on three matters, Mr. Speaker. Work on the Moliniere Road is continuing. We expect the work to be completed by the last quarter of 2024. However, all things being equal, the contractor has given a commitment that they will certainly seek to try and accelerate as much as they can, work to see whether or not it is possible to have the road available and open in August or September of this year. But contractually, the obligation is for December. Thus far, we've been blessed with relatively good weather for the first quarter of 2024, and the main artery to the western road will then become open.

Of course, the situation continues to pose a challenge for commuters on the West Coast who are required to either go through the bypass road of Mt. Kumar or the Moritz Road, both of which are considerably longer. And in case of the Mt Kumar road, considerably more difficult, given the fact that the width of the road was not meant to accommodate, really, two-way traffic on any significant numbers. That has affected commuters, in particular members of the public who are required to get bus transportation to get to Sauteurs, St. John and St. Mark in particular. So, Mr. Speaker, we are quite eager and keen to make sure that the work on this road is completed.

The second major artery that work will commence on shortly, Mr. Speaker, is the Cliff to Woburn Road. In fact, the original intent was to stop vehicular access to that area starting this Monday, but in light of the long Easter weekend that is upon us, Mr. Speaker, as well as the CARIFTA Games, we've taken the decision to allow access to the road to remain, until after these the Easter weekend. And we expect that preliminary works for the commencement of major renovation of that piece of road to therefore commence in earnest, immediately after the end of the Easter period.

Mr. Speaker, I will provide more details at the next Sitting of the House of Parliament on this issue. But we, suffice it to say, Mr. Speaker, that the original designs which we inherited from the past administration were not adequate. It was simply seeking to reconstruct the retaining walls and repave the road. Well, Mr. Speaker, if you know

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that road, in its current state, there are areas where two vehicles cannot pass without one stopping. So there are some parts of the road that are quite narrow, less than six metres.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we had to go back to the designers, Beston, the consultants, and indicate to them in 2023, 2024, you can't be designing a road where two vehicles can't pass. You can't be designing a road that is in a heavy pedestrian area, with houses both at the bottom and the top, and there's no sidewalk. So, Mr. Speaker, we asked the consultants to go back to the drawing board, to widen the road, particularly in the areas where it is quite narrow, because we are coming from three main arteries.

We are coming from Springs Main Road, we are coming from the Woodlands Main Road; actually, four. We are coming from the Woburn Main Road. We are coming from the Calivigny Main Road. We are coming from the Morne Jaloux Main Road. That's actually five. And you're all getting into this narrow bottleneck with hairpin corners, a narrow way, cliffs on the side, and retaining walls at the bottom.

So what the construction will do, Mr. Speaker, is to widen the roads by cutting into the cliffs, straighten the road, so that the line of sight is improved. The construction of sidewalks, so that our citizens can walk on the pavement without the risk of being run over by these large trucks, and trailers that are heading up the East Coast, all the way to St. Patrick and St. David so our hotel and so on development, and to assure that there is improved safety for pedestrians along that area.

We are expecting, Mr. Speaker, that the work once commenced should conclude in about eight to 10 months. While there are some significant corners, the road itself is not very long, and we're also fortunate that there are significant alternative routes. So, for example, the Woburn Main Road... So we will ask the public, Mr. Speaker, to bear with us and to respect the no-entry signs once they go up, to allow the contractors to work as efficiently and effectively as possible. I mean, obviously, the residents will have access, but for the remainder of the public, the Woburn public road does not provide a sufficient detour. You also have the Morne Jaloux, Marian Road, which comes back to White Gun as a sufficient detour. And so, we'll ask persons, please, to assist us by ensuring that they allow the contractors to work peacefully.

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Mr. Speaker, once we are able to procure the asphalt in the quantities that we think we will be able to, by working collectively with the Chinese and others who are able to give us alternative supplies of asphalt, there are other roads we would be looking to tackle. The Member of Parliament for the South of the island will be pleased to hear that we intend to tackle the True Blue main road. **(Applause)**

That's the road, Mr. Speaker, since the time of Sir Eric Matthew Gairy has been built and, to a large extent, ignored since then. Not only does the road lead to St. George's University, and I don't need to speak about the significance, economic and symbolic of St. George's University and the hundreds of Grenadians who work at that institution. But, Mr. Speaker, we will tackle the road.

There are many other parts of Grenada which have been neglected and not maintained, and we will tackle them as well. **(Applause)** There's an area called Maybouya in St. John, Mr. Speaker. For all of my adult life, this road has been abandoned. Persons going to Gouyave were made to go through Mt. Granby, Mt. Nesbit, exit onto Douglaston Main Road and then get to Gouyave. In recent times, the road was opened, having not been attended to, and not being fixed for decades. Mr. Speaker, we will tackle that stretch of the Maybouya Road and have it repaired. **(Applause)** So citizens of St. John, St. Mark and St. Patrick can have the benefit of being able to traverse the roads.

So, Mr. Speaker, I cite these two examples, so that we appreciate that the modest requests forward users, particularly vehicle owners who want to travel on good roads to pay an extra EC\$50, that their monies will be well accounted for, will be well spent, would be accountable and that all of the citizens of Grenada will benefit from improved road infrastructure, in the coming months and coming years ahead. **(Applause)**

So, Mr. Speaker, I would obviously commend the affirmation of the Resolution to the Honourable Members of the House, and in particular for those Members whose road networks have been neglected for several years, and would stand to benefit from the plans to address those issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. Leader of the Opposition.

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**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, I sat there for the last 40, 45 minutes, and you know I nearly forgot what this Resolution was about. **(Laughter)** Because I got a whole diatribe about road work throughout the country. Some of the facts, which could be easily contested if we're left to have a debate on that separately, but that's not what we are here for. It seems like an EC\$50 increase will solve all the problems that have been mentioned there, but that's the assumption. **(Laughter)** Which is clearly, could not be factual, but some of us like to speak, they would just clearly, they're not factual, but some of us like to speak as an opportunity to proceed.

But just to make the point, the fact is drivers have been paying that EC\$50 for some time now. You already came to Parliament, and many things that were said here today were said by the Minister, then, about the need for the increase of EC\$50. There's a repetition of what was said on the additional stuff about roads and so on. So, the fact is, drivers were paying the extra EC\$50, literally without us coming here for the Resolution. That should have been done. So people were paying the extra EC\$50. So, you may have to do a retroactive adjustment, because otherwise, if this is given assent today and it's implemented as of the date, then you may have to return the EC\$50 to everybody who paid the amount.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, the fact is, you've been in Government for almost two years, you're now finding out all these problems? I'm just saying. **(Laughter)** I would have thought some of the plans would have been set in motion a long time ago. And to lecture us here about roads and what is the... **(Laughter)** Some of the best engineers were involved. The former Minister for Works of the Government then... there's no one in "This Side" who has the qualification or experience, or general understanding about roads.

And the fact is, even the Member in presenting the said Bill said there was a large network of roads all around the country. **(Laughter)** Just this week, I was passing through from Gouyave to Clozier, heading to an activity; I went through Gouyave, and I couldn't believe the quality of the roads through Clozier, the two roads leading to Birch Grove, and I couldn't believe the quality of that road. It was done during our period of Government

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and all around the country. And it was also known that a major project was on the Western Side, and it's well known what happened with the resources then.

You know, it was unfortunate that we had to listen to 45 minutes of repetition of all the stuff, which to me does not make sense. But as I said, this is what was presented. My own prerogative, this has to be done, and it just shouldn't be done before. It's my view, because people were paying, and that's why I think it's here. And I certainly, well hopefully, one day, we'll be able to discuss the question of roads in this country, and what was done and what is to come. Going forward, I hope and pray that we do this, but I couldn't understand why we stood here for 45 minutes listening to this stuff. But as I said, people have the right, so they can do what they wish. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. Is it MP for St. Patrick East?

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, again. And I wish to state that I fully support the Resolution that has been presented to us this morning regarding the EC\$50 increase on motor vehicle licenses. And again, the Prime Minister indicated very well that this money will be used to improve the road maintenance throughout the country. We are looking to raise somewhere in the tune of EC\$2.6 million in 2024, to be able to assist with our road maintenance.

And while some of the taxpayers would have already paid that EC\$50, and we did not have in place the Resolution passed, we have agreed that we will give a credit to the taxpayers who already paid, so that nobody would actually be affected unduly. So, we are making sure that going forward, in the next cycle of motor vehicle payments and tax payments, the credit will be given to the taxpayers.

Now, let me say that motor vehicle licenses are collected during the first quarter of the year. And therefore, having passed the budget in early January, obviously, we would not have been able to at least meet that deadline of having that Resolution in place, to make sure it works in sync. Notwithstanding, we are hoping that going forward we'll be able to collect even increased amounts of money and so on to ensure that our roads are fixed.

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And I also hasten to add to what the Prime Minister was saying earlier on, everybody wants their road fixed, whether it's a back road or a side road. Again, some of the roads have been affected by not having proper drainage. Take, for example, the parish of St. Patrick, after the heavy rains in December. Several of our roads were compromised, and our bridges were compromised. I've heard people talking out there, the Parliamentarians in St. Patrick East and West have done nothing.

Now I don't know where they expect the Government to get money to fix a road in three months' time. Now, whether you want to call it politics or you want to call it politicking, I think some of our people out there need to understand one thing. The Government do not expect manna to fall from heaven to be able to do some of the things they want us to do. Yes, the bridge in Morne Fendue, High Gate and in Madeys need urgent attention. But they were there for several years, untouched. Several years.

We have now moved to try and give the bridge in Morne Fendue a facelift, and you're still hearing people talking about the bridge being compromised, and it's going. Yes, it's going to go if we don't attend to it, but we'll have to have appropriate resources to get it done. Again, there are other projects in St. Patrick's that need attention, take, for example, the Breakwater. People are saying what? Nothing is done to basically deal with the Breakwater in Sauteurs.

Again, we need resources to do that. And I must inform them that while they have not seen anything practical on the ground happening, apart from the regular clean-ups that we do on the Breakwater and so on, we are well on our way to make sure that, that particular project is going to be addressed, because we have a design for it, we have the environmental and social impact assessment being **(applause)** done and as such, sooner than later, that Breakwater becomes an active project on the ground.

And so, the people of St. Patrick who are complaining that nothing is happening to St. Patrick, we are not only spending money in St. David and St. George, but we are spending money throughout the country to improve the infrastructure of Grenada. And I want to leave that point before this Honourable House. I thank you. **(Applause)**

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**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, MP for St. Patrick East. And I didn't see... Okay. Honourable MP for the Town of St. George.

**Hon. Peter David:** Mr. Speaker, good morning, everybody. Mr. Speaker, I...

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Sorry.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** ... If I may be permitted. It's not...

**Hon. Peter David:** ... No, no, no.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** It's just to explain, Mr. Speaker, to seek your permission for the departure of the MP for St. Patrick West. I think he's been informed that there are five or six houses that are on fire in Chantimelle at the moment.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** And given the pictures of what he sent to me, I told him I thought it would be appropriate that we seek your leave to have him excused to, at least, show support to the families who're impacted by it. I think the fire is actually raging as we speak. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. Quite in order. Honourable MP for the Town of St. George.

**Hon. Peter David:** Mr. Speaker, let me say I wish the Member for St. Patrick West well as he ventures to St. Patrick, and I hope the families are safe and we can all assist in whatever problems there are. So let me just express my deepest best wishes to them.

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Mr. Speaker, I wasn't intending to speak on this issue, but I just... roads came up, and there's a particular road that is affecting my constituency, River Road. The River Road Project. Don't start by saying nothing was done. Don't start by saying nothing was done. All the walls are fixed. The money is there, bridges done, everything. Please, my dear brother. As you mentioned, True Blue, I understand the SGU needs to get their road. I remember years ago, there was a discussion about the True Blue road, and there were some discussions with SGU to see if they could use some of the millions made to help.

I'm just saying. I don't know what discussions are taking place. I'm simply saying that while we moved to fix the True Blue Road, remember that the River Road Project, beautiful project, long awaited project needs to be completed, so that the people who go to St. Andrew's everyday like the Clerk and others, yourself, Mr. Speaker, as you pass through River Road, you won't be experiencing all the difficulties. I couldn't let the opportunity pass when roads are being mentioned not to talk about that River Road Project.

But my friend from St. Patrick West is complaining that people are complaining. You sit there and complain that nothing was done over the years for roads, that's what you say with all the network of roads that we have throughout the country, with all the... My brother from St. George North East, I know. Don't bow down, lift your head. Be proud of the... what is it that you call the road? Mt. Kumar Road. So things were done, but remember we will always... Grenada has a particular type of terrain that will always need roads to be maintained. The Mabouya Road is an example.

When I was in the NDC Government years ago, we were told about the Mabouya road. It was costing about EC\$5 million, then. Couldn't be done. So don't complain about people complaining and nothing was done, when you telling people nothing was done. So now they're saying to you, "You come two years now, nothing is done", because it is a culture that we've encouraged, not to recognise what was done. Let us start by recognising what was done, so that the people understand that in two years, they won't be telling you that you have done nothing.

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I don't know if you do, but the people are suggesting you didn't do, but don't complain when you stand and complain that we who spent years there haven't done anything. We are encouraging that culture.

So, back to the main point, the River Road Project, my dear brother. Let's see if we can get it to the top of your agenda. SGU needs it, but **(laughter)** let's get the River Road people up and running. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, that's all I intended to say. Thank you. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for the Town of St. George. And is it MP for St. George South?

**Hon. Andy Williams:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to everyone. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Bill. Sorry... **(Inaudible comments by a Member)** The Resolution. Right. And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make reference to the point the Prime Minister was making. And, you know, I don't think, Mr. Speaker, it's a case of you did this and I did that. I think the bigger picture is this, Mr. Speaker, that we are seeing the Ministry of Infrastructure being weakened as the years go by. And we have noticed that.

And we are also seeing, Mr. Speaker, from the public the demand to get roads done. And the bigger picture here is, how do we increase the capacity of the Ministry of Infrastructure to get those roads done? Everything in the Ministry of Infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, has to be contracted out. Everything. Well, as part of the transformation process, Mr. Speaker, for us, is to increase the capacity of the Ministry of Infrastructure, so that things can be done in a better and more timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen a case, you know, and some say it's just two years, but, Mr. Speaker, some have been there for over 10 years, and the True Blue Road, which brings in revenue for the country, is still undone. So, yes, you may want to say that, you know, or to use a case where maybe True Blue is probably the big shot or the big boys, but let us be reminded that True Blue brings in, or the University brings in, approximately 25% of Grenada's GDP. And I am proud to hear that the road will be seen after. I'm proud. **(Applause)**

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So let's not go the petty route, Mr. David, sorry, Mr. Speaker, of **(laughter)** you know, I did this and you did that. We are saying that right now, we would be working on increasing the capacity of the Ministry of Infrastructure, so that better results can be had, and we all can benefit from it. Thank you very much. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, MP for St. George South. And Honourable MP for St. Andrew South East.

**Hon. Emmalin Pierre:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on the Resolution presented, I sat and I listened to the Honourable Prime Minister, Member for St. David, and the truth is throughout the, I would say the first half of the presentation I was literally at some point nodding my head, because I genuinely was in agreement with most of what he was saying up to that point.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that our roads will always require maintenance. The fact is, even after this administration, the current administration, and other administrations will have to build upon what is done now. So it's a continuity.

Mr. Speaker, the reference to neglect was what caught my attention **(laughter)**, and I began to feel a little bit different about the presentation. Because it was said with a smile, Mr. Speaker, and almost implied that the previous administration would have neglected so many of our roads. And it just brought me back that, this current Administration in Opposition, this is how we actually got labelled, Mr. Speaker, as a "Concrete and Asphalt Government", **(applause)** because we were doing so much in this area.

So when you look around Grenada, Mr. Speaker, I don't think we can find any administration that could be compared, in relation, I mean "hmmm" might be an expression that's going to define the amount of work that was done under the previous administration that created a model in terms of infrastructural development around the country. So absolutely, I agree that there are roads that need to have serious work done, and there will always be, Mr. Speaker. So that was one of the first things that caught my

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attention.

The second thing, Mr. Speaker, that caught my attention, where I began to disagree with parts of the presentation, was the point that was made as it relates to the rental of equipment. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to use this opportunity to make a serious plea on behalf of private contractors here. Mr. Speaker, "All of the tools are rented", the Member for St. David, Prime Minister, repeated this about three times. And then he went on to say, "We will procure equipment". And, Mr. Speaker, for what it's worth, I just want to say this. The previous administration was on a path of empowering our local contractors and empowering people who are in business as it relates to this particular initiative.

When reference was made that the equipment is rented for a day to do half-day work, I would say, of course, correct this if that is the situation. I don't know and if you believe that people are not giving value for money let's, let's correct that. But, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we might be heading down a dangerous road, to try to reverse this. I noted though, very carefully that later on reference was made to the sourcing of asphalt and the private sector was referred to there.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say this. There are many ordinary men and women who would have built their lives by investing when Government decided then, that it wanted to outsource certain services. And if you look at the cost benefit analysis of that, one would conclude that there is a serious danger as it relates to reversing this policy position. You want to ask yourself the question as it relates to maintenance of equipment? We want to go back to what has been the management system, and what normally happens when Government generally own major equipment and manages it on its own? Right? It's a recipe for problems in itself.

And so, I am not saying, I am not saying, I am not saying that the Government cannot procure, I'm not going to say what the government should or should not do, but I'm just saying, Mr. Speaker, there are two things. If you look at the cost-benefit analysis of what happens, governments throughout the world owning and managing major equipment, as opposed to empowering local contractors, with systems in place to prevent the issues that were raised, I would say let us take a serious look at that.

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Let us sit down with those contractors. How we can tighten the arrangements might be one issue. How can we provide additional support to buy better equipment as was referred to, upscale, upgrade what they have. Mr. Speaker, I want to seriously plea that we reconsider, that we don't like this model, let us go back to a model where government own all the tractors, all of this, all of the **(laughter)** Mr. Speaker, I'm saying let us go back and look, not just in Grenada, but look throughout the world at models where this did not produce the expected result.

And again, I'm saying let us promote, let us invest, let us encourage ordinary men and women to invest in being able to provide services to Government, empower themselves, empower their communities.

The justification as it relates to community service. Mr. Speaker, there has been a model and I must admit, more could have been done to improve on that model, where people who pay taxes, people who import those equipment that we refer to, there can be agreements and arrangements. So there's a slide in Levera, of course, there can be an agreement whereby "X Trucking" can be called upon to give back to the community. There has been arrangements in the past. Did they work very well?

I would say they can be improved. But I'm saying, let us not go buying trucks, for example, as opposed to empowering truck owners to make a living, to do well but to also give back. I am totally supportive of having and holding people accountable to giving back to their community. We might be considering something that may not give us the kind of results that we are looking for. Thank you. **(Applause)**

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

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, hold on. Honourable MP for St. Mark.

**Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am well aware

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that much has been said, and so I will not be lengthy. I rise to make some comments on the Resolution. And, Mr. Speaker, I may have been tempted to speak about roads that were not done and roads that were done, that need to be done, and projects all over that need to be done, but I don't think it would fit into the content of this Bill. It speaks about vehicles and the type of vehicles, and an increase of EC\$50. And so, maybe we have to find another opportunity to speak about the number of roads. For example, in the little parish like St. Mark, I could speak about the number of roads that were done there.

And also, I have concerns about projects that were in the pipeline, as my friend from the South would have brought the pipe at some time. And if they could look for those projects in that pipeline and do something about it, I'd be happy. But, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say on behalf of the people of Grenada that we have heard a lot of promises, and it is time for us to move from promises. Let us, let the government achieve some of the promises made, before and coming into government, during the election and since coming into government. Let the people see something more tangible than words, and then more promises can come, but I hope quite a lot more promises, piling up on top of promises that have not been achieved.

Mr. Speaker, I just have a couple of comments on this Resolution. I. I agree totally with the increase in the fees, because we are all aware that fees for everything are going up. We're all aware of the condition of the road, as so eloquently put forward by our Prime Minister, and work has to be done, and it costs. So I have absolutely no problem with the extra EC\$50. And I'm happy to hear that those of us who would have paid before this Act came into effect would be reimbursed. And also to advise my colleagues on the "Other Side" that we must be aware of these things before, you know, having our citizens do certain things or meet certain requirements without the necessary steps being made here in Parliament, as it is being done before. So we should put the what goes first, the horse before the cart, or the horse before the cart and not the cart before the horse.

And the other thing I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, I am looking at part 1 of this Resolution, where it speaks about motor vehicle license fees and where it speaks about vehicle types. And we are all concerned about the integrity of the road, what the road was built for, and what it could accommodate. And as I look, when it speaks to the vehicle

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types and the special license vehicles, where it speaks about those between 10 tonnes and 12, between a certain fee is charged, between 12 and 15, or not exceeding 50 a certain fee is charged and those exceeding 15 tonnes, that open ended, that open ended section there, bothers me and it has bothered me for a long time. And I know under the NNP, there was a cap at one time to the tonnage of trucks or vehicles (**applause**) carrying heavy goods that could have been brought in.

But I also note that at some point in time, it was completely ignored and the maximum fee was just being charged, and that cap was not observed. And therefore if we're going to maximize the \$50 dollars per driver, as or vehicle, whatever it is, that we're asking, I think I just want to advise that we consider some kind of cap on the, on the tonnage instead of just leaving it open ended and saying above 15 tonnes. And I'm not criticising, I am just really requesting that we look at that, because sometimes I look at some size of trucks and the load that they have, and they're still overloaded and overflowing, and I know it is doing more harm than good.

So maybe it might, it could be said, and it could be said, well, it's happened in your time, but this is the government that has promised to fix. And so, in the, you know in the spirit of transformation, I really want to urge that we look at this, and perhaps at some time consider putting a cap on the, the size or the tonnage of the vehicle and the loads that they could carry, so that maybe our roads could last us a little longer. This is my contribution, Mr. Speaker. (**Applause**)

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, MP for the constituency of St. Mark. Oh, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North East.

**Hon. Kate Lewis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And of course, Mr. Speaker, I didn't have any plan to make any contribution to this Resolution, because the fact is, we have no problem with an EC\$50 increase. We do understand that road maintenance is necessary, and with everything that has continued to evolve, more vehicles on the road, more people have access to transportation, and more people are driving now, we have

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more heavy-duty vehicles on the road because of the construction over the years. So that has not been an issue. But when the conversation opened up to the maintenance of roads and what was not done, I think that is where this whole debate started.

And a point was made, Mr. Speaker, by one of the Honourable Members, that the Ministry of Infrastructure has been weakened over the years. And this is what got my attention, because I know many engineers have been hired over the years, today I believe the current CTO has been one of the engineers who were hired at the time. And I would say, what is weakening the Ministry of Infrastructure, in my opinion, based on observation today, yes, it is weakened now, more today than ever before.

There is a community development ministry or part ministry that is weakening the Ministry of Infrastructure. And the reasons for me saying this, Mr. Speaker, in my constituency when road projects or infrastructural projects had to be done, the Ministry of Infrastructure supervise that through their public office in Pearls there, the road officers they would assess the roads to be done, assess the scope of work and the materials and so, today, under the Community Development Organisation within the ministry, you're seeing political activists without any form of experience or qualification in these areas doing scope of work.

And let me give you an example. A piece of work was done in a particular area in my constituency. I was trying to get further details because materials were dropped off, and I think the contractor was going to pay his labour and the remainder of the materials he kept, well, he has it. Right now, we have truckloads of sand and gravel that are being sold EC\$5 a bag, EC\$10 a bag, and that is the remainder of materials from a particular project done, under the community development. So, if the Ministry of Infrastructure was paying or supervising this road, paying attention to or supervising this project, this should not have happened.

Because when they give you the scope of work and the materials necessary to complete it, you would not have such an excess that the contractor is now selling, and people are buying from the contractor the excess materials. This is what is weakening the Ministry of Infrastructure, because some of their responsibilities are being taken away

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from them and being put under community development. And I'm sure, if they don't, do not believe me, please research it. It is a cause for concern. Nobody should be going to a contractor's home to buy an EC\$5 bag of sand from material remaining after a project has been completed. It is happening, Mr. Speaker. This is weakening the Ministry of Infrastructure, together with the MIT. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Speaker: (Laughter)** Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North East, for your contribution. Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I think in the interest of time, there is no need for me to prolong the discussion. I would just add to my Honourable friend from the Town of St. George that the St. John's River Project is, in fact, a priority. I had said previously that the quotation we got for constructing two concrete buildings was in excess of \$30 million. And yes, in excess of \$30 million, and in those circumstances, unless there was absolutely no other alternative but those two bridges, we obviously had to find ways to ensure that we were getting value for money.

I am happy to report to the Member for the Town of St. George that, in fact, there are alternatives. And some of the alternatives are perhaps in keeping with some of the more aesthetically historic and pleasing features that the area of River Road has. You know, we have a historic Green Bridge there which should really be preserved and turned into something rather than sitting rotting. But we have procured, Mr. Speaker, two steel bridges at a fraction of the cost.

The bridges are, in fact, on the island. They've been shipped, they've arrived, the designs for the abutments of the bridges are more or less completed, we expect that the design review process will take place, and once that commences, then the time frame for, in fact, installing the bridges will be reduced significantly. Because, as opposed to actually having to build a concrete bridge, which will take a significant time, you're actually building just the abutments and assembling them. So, rest assured MP for the Town of St. George, we appreciate they need to ensure that this project is completed. And we should

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be able to provide further updates in due course.

I also want to assure the MP for St. Andrew South East, I actually agree with everything she said, except perhaps at a point where she was exaggerating a little **(laughter)** when she said the Government would in all the trucks in all the things. I think she recognises **(laughter)** in that, what I'm saying is that, if everything is outsourced, you cannot therefore respond on your time. Because if you have a contractor who, who you have an agreement with and he's currently on a site, and there is a need particularly to either respond quicker to some emergency or some pressing social or community need where people are pressing the MP for St. Patrick East to say, he's taking too long, and **(laughter)** the contractor says, "Well, boss I can't move because the tractor is in somebody's site etcetera, etcetera, then it simply means you can't do anything.

So what we are saying is that the Ministry should at least have some capacity that is managed, that is, I don't want to use the word minimal, but certainly that is managed to ensure that we don't end up in a situation as indicated by the Honourable Member, to respond to some of the needs that obvious. And so, for example, when you have small holes that need to be patched and stuff like that, if you have to wait to rent a cutter from someone, it takes too long. And when people are driving their children to school, and they're going in the pothole and so on, they get annoyed, they're coming back, you know.

So we have to have the capacity to have some responses for some of this smaller type of stuff. But obviously, the Ministry of Infrastructure has absolutely no intention; on the contrary, one of the things we've been doing is in fact reinforcing the need to empower local Grenadian contractors and businessmen. Mr. Speaker, I have spent an enormous amount of my time trying to address the fact that at a regional level, for example, institutions like the Caribbean Development Bank, their procurement rules almost automatically exclude Grenadian contractors from bidding on projects that are funded by taxpayers.

So all of these holes... First of all, when you go and look at the Caribbean Development Bank procurement guidelines, they are so difficult to even read. They're excluding all our contractors. The only way a local contractor hopes to even be able to

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get a piece of the pie is, he has to do a joint venture with a Chinese, a Trinidadian or some other company. And we've been, we've been raising this issue at CDB, I've been fighting, and I don't mean any disrespect to our regional colleagues, or regional consultants who are working in Grenada, but let's take the Grenada Education Enhancement Project. We've got a Grenada Christian Academy designed by a non-Grenadian firm, the contract essentially awarded to, thankfully, a Grenadian who had to do a joint venture with a Trinidadian firm. That's the thing we're fighting for. And then on top of that, the consultant who has to supervise the work is a non-Grenadian firm.

I've been at pains trying to address this. I've fought to get a Grenadian consultant to supervise the Cliff to Woburn road. And when I say fought, I mean literally fight. So we have a significant challenge, so we want to build up our capacity, and our contractors also have to learn to work together. Right? **(Laughter)** It's them against the world, not them against each other in Grenada. They have to learn to partner and do joint ventures together, so that we can also help them. A lot of them don't want to talk to one another, and want to knife each other in the back, and so, sometimes when you're trying to help them, and tell them and tell them to come together because you're too small, you wouldn't qualify. You know they don't want to work together.

So they have to work together to build the capacity, to build their ability to actually take on some of the big projects. Because it's all well and good to build 100 feet of road, but I don't know how it feels a Trinidadian firm, other firms from outside of Grenada, St. Lucia et cetera, they're getting the consultancy contracts they're getting design contracts and then it's still coming construction contracts, they're getting the design contracts and then they're still coming and get the construction contracts. And you know what they're doing, subcontracting the work to our local people and then creaming off the top.

So I agree that we have to build the capacity of our local contractors. We are keen to do so. We are encouraging our local contractors as well to up their game and to invest sometimes in their business. Sometimes as soon as they get the money, they spend it on other things **(laughter)** that are... this House is too polite to talk about, but we also want them to invest back in their business, to maintain their equipment, improve their

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equipment, to buy the equipment, to train the staff so that we can get, they can get more at work and, and not only work in Grenada, but elsewhere. So, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the sentiments.

And finally, the suggestion about the tonnage. I hope Member for St. Mark, if we do proceed with that line, that you'll support it when the time comes, because I agree. **(Laughter)** There are some vehicles in Grenada that are not meant for the roads in Grenada. They're simply too big, they're too wide, the capacity is too much, and, fearfully, particularly for some of our bridges, the constant weight and vibration could in many instances undermine a lot of our bridges, which simply were not designed for that type of capacity.

So, that is something we'll have to obviously consult a lot on, particularly the heavy equipment operators and the people in the construction industry, to make sure that we can get the right size and type of vehicles. So all I would say, Mr. Speaker, as you can see, there are times when we can agree on both sides of the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Motion approved.**

**Deputy Clerk:** Item 15 – Bills.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, there are four Bills, and just as a matter of housekeeping, and I think for good order, I wish to indicate that I will move a Motion to suspend the Standing Order to take the first three Bills. The Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amendment) Bill,

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2024, and the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, 2024, through all the stages.

However, I would only ask that the Electronic Communications Bill be read a first time, and that the Standing Order not be suspended in relation to that Bill. Obviously, given the length, nature and complexity of the Bill, I think Members of the House would need time to pay attention and come back, having had the time to reflect a little. So I just thought I should indicate that before I start.

All right, so, Mr. Speaker, I wish to move a Motion that Standing Order be suspended to take the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024 through all the stages.

Sorry. Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for the first reading a Bill for an Act, entitled the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

**Clerk:** A Bill which seeks to amend the Road Traffic Act, Chapter 289A, to reduce the minimum age for the issuance of a driver's license to an applicant from 25 years to 18 years, shortly entitled, Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 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 and this Sitting.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Relevant Standing Order suspended.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

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

**Bills: Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024**

**Question proposed.**

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the aim of the Bill is pretty straightforward and simple, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's in keeping with the comment by the Honourable Member for St. Andrew South East of the need to, in fact, encourage and support our contractors or citizens to engage in commerce, to engage in business and to help to empower them. So it's in two parts, Mr. Speaker.

It addresses the opportunity for persons who hold in effect a B-Class, a C-Class or C1-Class license to be able to upgrade their license without sitting an exam by moving from B to D-Class or from C to D-Class or from C1 to D-Class, if they have driven for more than five years in that particular class and if they deem medically fit to continue driving. So, in very layman's terms, this is what it's seeking to do.

Now, the B, the C, the C1 and the D-Class licenses, Mr. Speaker, are obviously associated with the type of vehicle that one is permitted to drive. So, in particular, if you have a B-Class, I guess in ordinary terms you'll be driving a regular private vehicle, if you have a C and a C1-Class, you'll be driving a different type of vehicle, and if you have a D, you'll be driving a different type of vehicle.

The main aim, Mr. Speaker, is to get persons in the B, C or C1 to be able to move to a D-Class license. It is not meant to allow a person who has a B license to automatically get the C license, or if you have a C license, to automatically get a C1 license. You would still have to go through the normal process there. It is merely meant to allow someone who has a B license to get a D license, someone who has a C license to get a D license or someone who has a C1 license to get a D license. So that's the first point I want to emphasise, Mr. Speaker.

And, again, as I said, you have to be driving for five years in the particular class, and then you have to have, and I think the Royal Grenada Police Force was keen on that, confirmation that you're medically fit, obviously to continue driving.

And the question is, why are we seeking to have this? Mr. Speaker, we've had significant requests from persons, particularly small business owners and so on, who are

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faced with the situation where someone who has a D-Class license essentially can't drive a pickup truck, and Mr. Speaker, to a large extent, that's what the D-Class license is. I'm saying by description of vehicle pickup truck but the proper description based on the Road Traffic Act, we'll see a vehicle that is 7,000 kgs and under but when you say 7,000 kgs and under to the average person, it's not actually giving them a sense of what the vehicle is, so it's really the pickup trucks.

And so, Mr. Speaker, what we find is a situation where, you know, small business owners who are electricians, plumbers, or farmers find themselves where their employees have a private B-Class license. They can drive a car. They can drive an SUV, but they can't drive a pickup to drop the men or to drop the equipment. In many instances, the owner himself oftentimes has to be the driver, which takes away from his ability to actually do his own management of the day work and so often times what you find is that the owner or the manager time are the person with the D-Class license has to find himself driving the pickup to drop persons who actually can drive and who've been driving for more than five or 10 years but they don't have the D-Class license.

And so really, Mr. Speaker, it is aimed at significantly addressing that challenge that many of our small businesses face from the fact that many of the employees would have to leave and go get a test, essentially to drive the same vehicle because a pick-up is essentially an SUV with the back uncovered. So there's no real significant challenge in terms of the size of the vehicle. And so you have the anomaly where I think C and C1-Class licenses perhaps want to even argue that you are even more skilled if you already have a C or C1-Class license, and yet, still, you can get a D-Class license. So the aim, Mr. Speaker, is really to ensure that these categories of persons have the option to have their licenses endorsed with a D-Class license that allows them to be able to drive the D-Class.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, is that in order to drive a D-Class, the law correctly says you must be 25 years old. Which again, you know, one of the challenges about youth unemployment is that often times we create the barriers by our policies and our laws that actually create youth unemployment, you know. Why shouldn't a 24-year-old

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be able to drive a pickup, if he's a young farmer, if he's a plumber, an electrician? If we send him to NEWLO, will he learned his craft? He's gotten a job. He's built himself up. I mean, you can't be an electrician without really having a pickup or some sort of minibus. How are you going to carry the trucking, the this, the that, etcetara.

So the challenge here, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that we give young persons the opportunity to be able to get a D-Class license specifically. I want to emphasise again that it is a D-Class license, so we are not applying this to, for example, passenger buses, public service vehicles, because obviously, you are dealing with increased risk in driving a public bus. Because you are dealing with 16, 17, and 18 persons, you are dealing with passengers, and we need to make sure that the persons who are issued with bus licenses, in particular, are well-trained, well-equipped, and well-skilled to be able to make sure that that happens.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's really in layman's terms the objectives of the amendment to allow for an SRO to be passed; we give effect to those things. There are things we will have to work on as part of ensuring that that can happen. We obviously will have to speak with the Insurance industry because obviously that's one major stakeholder, because you'll appreciate that often times insurance policies have restrictions on who can and can't drive vehicles, the age at which they can and cannot drive and so on.

There's always a chicken and egg situation on what moves first, should the law move first or should we encourage the insurance to move, but knowing insurance and their aversion to risk, if the law doesn't move, Mr. Speaker, they're not going to move. So again, this is aimed at ensuring that our young people, the youth economy, have an opportunity to be able to drive D-class vehicles before they are 25. And Mr. Speaker, again, it's also to show confidence in our young people that they can be responsible if given the opportunity to be responsible.

So those are really, Mr. Speaker, the underlying rationale for seeking the amendment and bringing the legislation to Parliament. As part of this, as well, Mr. Speaker, one of the curiosities we observed when going through the legislation was the fact that there is actually no age restriction. We thought there were, but further scrutiny

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revealed there isn't. There's no age restriction on driving heavy vehicles. In other words, heavy specialised vehicles like a tractor or an excavator, but there is an age restriction on driving a pickup, so it may have been an oversight. So, the intention initially, Mr. Speaker, was that we would have had to have an amendment to address the excavators and so on, but that's not necessary. It's only the D-Class.

And so, Mr. Speaker, one of the things we certainly will seek to do as well is to encourage and ensure that we have some training programmes with the heavy equipment operators and owners that will give young people the opportunity to be trained specifically in the operations of those things from forklifts, to excavators, to tractors etcetera because those skill sets are needed.

I also want to specifically say, Mr. Speaker, targeting women as well. Because you know, traditionally you would not have seen women driving public service vehicles, buses, etcetera, and there is a lot more of that, there's really no reason why. And I don't know that men are better almost skilled drivers than women. Men may make their comments when they see women on the road, but I'm sure the insurance companies will tell you that there are far fewer accidents where the drivers are women compared to men, and I see a few women nodding.

So the truth, Mr. Speaker, is that even for the heavy equipment operations and so on, in terms of the training, we'll also be specifically targeting women as well because the statistics also still show that on a gender basis, unemployment is still higher amongst women than it is amongst men. So, Mr. Speaker, those are my comments in support of the Bill. Thank you. **(Applause)**

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

**Hon. Peter David:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make some comments on this Bill, but largely to support, particularly, the aim of the Bill, which is to deal with the increasing number of persons who are involved in businesses that require them to drive

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these vehicles. I have been inundated with calls from persons who, in fact, I just received a message a while ago from somebody who didn't even know that we are bringing that Bill this morning, saying that they need to do it, particularly when they go for loans. Some of these young people go for loans at the credit union, and they are opening a business. I have many young people around who start these things to deliver goods, you know, these goods businesses and so on, who need to drive these vehicles, and they are 18 years old. 18-year-olds, in my view, are more responsible than we sometimes believe, particularly when they are forced to get more responsible earlier in life these days.

So I welcome the Bill, particularly the fact that it will increase entrepreneurship among persons of that age. In particular, I know some families; there are families who have been in that business for many years and want to pass it down to the next generation, but they are unable to do it. But there is another factor too, that some people have this ambition, and when they are not able to realise the ambition, they go away or they do something else. And that you know, I know we stopping at D and you raised the issue of insurance because the issue of insurance has to be resolved because I know about the reservations in particular, with the 25 year olds, some of the insurance have their provision that you must be 25 years old, so there must be some level of discourse with the insurance companies to ensure that they are on board.

And I noticed the Member said that it stops at D, meaning it does not go onto D1, it does not go onto heavy trucks, and I understand because that is a bigger challenge. But we need to look at it because they have to wait until they get to 25 and if I have the ambition to become a truck driver and I leave school, I reach 19, 20, 21, by 21 I'm thinking of somewhere else so what do we find happening in this Country, we are importing some of the big truck drivers. There are a couple of, I know my brother, for example, has had to bring in people from outside to drive these trucks. I'm not suggesting that we move more rapidly than we believe is safe because the issue, as we have discussed on this side, is the issue of safety, ensuring that persons who drive these heavy trucks are able to drive responsibly.

There is an absolute increase, a tremendous increase. Everybody leaving school

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now wants to get a car, so the roads are becoming increasingly dangerous because there are more cars on the road, and the roads are better. Thanks to the Governments over the years, the roads are much better, and therefore, they're driving faster, trying to get from point A to point B faster, but that is the price you pay for development. You see, Mr. Speaker, there are some things that come with development; they increase in good things, but there's some increase in some bad things. And the danger of the road, that is why in more developments now you having these humps in the road, in fact, I was going down to the airport the other night, I didn't realise there was a big hump in the road, my head nearly went through the roof because I hit it hard but I understand because those roads cause people to move faster than we should.

So there is a need to limit the vehicles that some people drive because of lack of experience but I believe that there are instances where the D1, we could revisit the D1 and should revisit D1 because we, in particularly with all these major projects we need to develop a cadre of young Grenadian drivers for these heavy equipment you referred to and that they're driving not having a age restriction but you have it with the big trucks. So we need to look at that and I believe and I've been petitioned by a couple of people to ask to raise the issue of allowing, particularly the sons and daughters in some cases of persons who grew up in trucks, so they get used to it and they want to. I can use the same example of my brother, the other day he went away and he wanted his son to run the business. He can drive the trucks, but he can't get the license because he's 23, but he's as capable as a 25-year-old to drive the vehicle, but he can't get it. So there are people who really have the need, and it's important that we keep those jobs local.

So, Mr. Speaker, and Member for St. David, we welcome this initiative. We like the fact that you are combining safety, the passengers, and the fact that you say passenger buses; you need to add some safety measures there to make sure people don't run off. You know, I drive from Grenville sometimes, and I see how these bus drivers drive over the hills, and I hold my head. I'm sure the other colleagues who drive from St. Andrew see it all the time, so we need to have more sessions with people about safety on the road. We need to look at transport in general.

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I just want to make this point in closing. Transportation is not just about driving on the road it is a pillar of our economy. If we can't move people from point A to point B, the economy will grind to a halt. We need to develop, over the next several years, a transportation policy that addresses all these issues in a holistic way. We need to look at public transportation to see how we can better it. Each generation must improve on the previous generation's work. I think the previous generation has done a tremendous job in ensuring we have a road network. Grenada has one of the best road networks for transportation in the Caribbean (**applause**), and we must be thankful for that.

But now we must treat transportation... For example, at night we need to work with the buses to get people to move, we are building hotels, in fact, I was happy this weekend to be at the Six Senses opening. I saw all my colleagues here, and we welcome you to the Range. It's a project that the NNP has done a lot to get, and I was happy that it came, and truthfully, that is how countries develop. A Government does this, we give praise to that, and we move on and do something else.

So we have Range. We have Six Senses. We have InterContinental, but you have that road, as you say, coming from the airport to get to St. David, we need to fix that. We need to make sure that travel is easier, but also we need to develop a public transport system that allows workers to get safely from point A to point B, even after dark, or else the economy will not develop the way it should be developed.

The unions have complained about it, the safety of their workers going from hotels to Gouyave. I think that there were some incidents in that direction, but, Mr. Speaker, as we move to discuss this issue in the context of development, in the context of businesses, let us also come together. Let us work together to develop a transportation system which allows me to get a job that starts at ten at night, and I can be guaranteed to get to work at ten at night, and I get back home at three in the morning. Maybe you need to incentivise some of the bus owners, maybe you need to give them tax breaks, maybe you need to find ways to make sure that they get this if they run these routes at these times.

So, I make that point to say, Mr. Speaker, using the opportunity, we support this adjustment to the transport, to the Traffic Act, but we look forward to more improvements

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in our public transport system so that it can serve as what it is which is a pillar to a development. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for the Town of St. George, and I notice the MP for St. George South.

**Hon. Andy Williams:** Good morning again, Mr. Speaker, and everyone. I just rise to support this Bill, and also, Mr. Speaker, I felt compelled to say something about this Bill. In addition to what the Prime Minister said, I think this Bill also enables one to drive a truck that is under 7,000 kg.

And, you know, when I started my business in 2011, Mr. Speaker, my mother gifted me with a truck and it wasn't the best of trucks, but it was under 7,000 kg and that was the truck that I used to go on the port to transport my goods up and down and it saved me tremendously. It helped me to grow my business, Mr. Speaker.

And when I saw this Bill again, you know, I picture the young entrepreneur who is looking to make it, Mr. Speaker, and who doesn't have the money to employ, you know, a driver at the time. Right now, he can use this upgrade to really enhance his business and be more hands-on in his business and save some money that he can invest back into his business to make it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I really applaud this Bill. I support this Bill. I am a product of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, and that is why, Mr. Speaker, that was one of the secrets, Mr. Speaker, why I could have had little sales like the salt-fish that Dr. Modeste, Mr. Speaker, used to come and buy regularly, supporting me in Grand Anse. Right? **(Laughter)**

So, Mr. Speaker, that was part of the reason why, Mr. Speaker, I was able to do that, and you see, Mr. Speaker, let me just say something. If I recall properly, Mr. Speaker, that... **(Inaudible comments) (Laughter)** Well, Dr. Modeste, Mr. Speaker, was one of my best customers. She bought, you could say, the most salt-fish, so she could tell you the quality of the salt-fish. Right.

But, Mr. Speaker, on a serious note, you know, I think it was in 2010 we had a

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similar Bill passing under the NDC Administration, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, Mr. Speaker, sometimes we can talk the talk, but I want to applaud this Government, Mr. Speaker. I think Mr. David was on the right side some years ago, Mr. Speaker, when this Bill was passed. So sometimes we can talk the talk, Mr. Speaker, but I applaud this Government, Mr. Speaker, again for walking the walk because I can tell you that there will be youths outside there that would benefit from a Bill like this. **(Applause)** So again, I want to applaud this Administration for taking the step forward and making the bold decision to do this. Thank you very much. **(Applause)**.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for South St. George. There are several lights on. I notice... Well, let's go with the lady who is standing.

**Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lady can make up her mind while the gentleman is kind of prevaricating. Mr. Speaker, as I did previously, I'm going to be very short. I want to lend my support to the Bill as presented by the Honourable Member for St. David and the Prime Minister.

I must confess that initially, when I looked at it, I had concerns. I said whoa at 18 years you get your license and then you jump, you're driving people, you're driving big trucks on the roads, and it is already scary, and perhaps we're going to add a little bit more to the scare. But I'm pleased to hear the Member for St. David say that you are going to limit it up to D and then certain vehicles, and I'm not sure I heard whether there'd be some, maybe more attempts to do some training to ensure. I'm not sure, but I know the police and you're the Member for... Sorry.

The presenter of the Bill, the Member for St. David, is the Minister for National Security, and I know that police at one time used to do that. I used to hear it announce, you know, that there are programmes where you can get certified in defensive driving, and I no longer hear. I haven't heard, and I'm not looking at periods. I'm just saying it used to happen, and I haven't heard about it in a long time. So, I'm just asking that the presenter of the Bill, the Member for St. David, use his good office to maybe see if we

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can do that again.

I have heard the statistics for Road Traffic accidents and they're not encouraging and so as we look to put more possibilities into the hands of youth and more drivers, let us just ensure that our youths can live for tomorrow and be the future that they're intended to be for our country and that we maybe can do something that will not prevent them and will not maybe delay their timing, but will enhance the safety on the road for them and for others.

So I was quite pleased to hear the Minister say that. We've been receiving calls, I was you know, it was interesting to hear what people are saying and somebody said there are some, I think SUVs or some Station Wagons that are longer than a pickup truck and as you get your license, you can drive it. So why not? So I stand fully behind this Bill and I just hope that there will be some measure of discrimination in terms of the D1, D-Class and the D1, so that in time, persons can take up the driving of this vehicle with some measure of competency, and we have some more assurance on the road. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, the Honourable MP for St. Mark. Leader of His Majesty's Opposition.

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, in terms of the policy, the Member of St. George has already spoken on our behalf as far as the policy and this Bill are concerned, so I'm not going to have anything, but I just want it to be clear. Whenever these Bills of this nature come forward, our role is not to oppose things just for the sake of opposing, sometimes. In fact, you recall, Mr. Speaker, in the issue related to the rent, when I made the point, you see I was not opposing but was raising a concern and nothing I heard on the response dealt with the concern and because I was dealing with the possibility that we might have increase in costs. I heard about the ability to do things better and faster and make it more convenient, but I haven't heard anything about cost, because what I would have wanted to hear is we looked at a percentage, maybe less

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than 1.25% or something like that, and compare what the numbers are going to be.

I didn't hear that, but I just want to make a point that this Bill, we are supporting it in many ways and with the intention. In fact, I was out when you were closing the Bill. I remember the Member for St. Mark had talked about the tonnage, and she indicated that the Prime Minister did indicate his understanding of that point, and this is excellent because I think that's how we need to approach this.

So I want to rise to make two points that need to be looked at if they're not being looked at yet. You know, Mr. Speaker, with the environmental issues being a major concern around the world, because they're moving to electric cars and getting away from gasoline and so on, the pollution.

You know that some countries right now moving rapidly because of this world question of Climate Change, an important issue and they have been literally dumping lots of the vehicles that they can't use in their own Countries and because they're cheap, we have been absorbing them here in our parts of the world and that's why we have a lot of people who never was able to buy a vehicle, if they able to buy it but the point is the problems that we have. Politically, it might be popular to say we limit the amount of vehicles, but when you look at it, we have to look at our children's future, you know, and so, I raised it, Prime Minister and Member who is presenting the Bill for what it's worth, so examine this.

The second point I want to raise is that I travel on the Grenville Vale road, and it worries me. The speed of vehicles, these heavy trucks they're coming around a corner, I mean if you're not careful the speed in which they're driving, so we need to look, Prime Minister and Minister responsible for Transportation, that traffic, your traffic cops, you need to look at how to improve and increase the services there because the truth is some of us could get seriously injured if we do not watch it and I think the Police has a bigger role to play in managing what happens on the road. I am worried, sometimes I prefer to pass Mt. Moritz, which was a place I didn't like to pass because I feel safer there going through that road, especially during rush hour when the traffic is coming on. So I raise those two things because the size of the vehicle, the tonnage, which the Prime Minister

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has already agreed, should be looked at. The issue of emissions, I'm concerned about it and of course, the speed of drivers and the need to look at travel. Whatever we can do to aid that, because I believe this is a very noble initiative, so I want to join in with the Member of the Town of St. George and the Other Members for supporting this very important initiative here today. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition. Is it MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique? Please do.

**Hon. Tevin Andrews:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, stand to give support to this very important amendment, this Bill. You know, Mr. Speaker, I often wonder as a youth myself, why do we have so much restrictions; age restriction and so many things for our young people when at the age of 18 if one decide to become a politician or a lawmaker they can run for the office of being a Member of Parliament.

We have an example through you, Mr. Speaker, a very good friend and Member of Parliament for St. John, who was elected at age 23 and the restriction for a D-Class license is 25. It just doesn't add up. You can get married at 18 with your parent's consent at 16, I believe. The age of sexual consent is 16, so it's somewhat confusing to me at times why the restrictions are.

But I am happy, I am pleased by this Administration for taking this bold move to assist and to help improve and enhance business for our young people. It means that we are not just young people in Government, but we also demonstrate that we are concerned and care about young people and their livelihood, and of course, our economy.

I want the young people to pay attention to this, pay attention to the action of your Government. If you look at the action and the decisions we have been making, they are all tailored or geared towards your development, **(applause)** our development as a nation. Lest we forget, we must remember the bold decision that we've made, this young team made regarding minimum wage. **(Applause)** The bold decision that we made about pension **(applause)** and pension reform that is on the way. The bold decision that we

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made regarding the building of a new hospital (**applause**) is on its way. Empowering our young people, not through words, but by our actions. We're all about giving the next generation and the generations to come a hand up and not necessarily a hand out. Pay attention to your Government at work. (**Applause**) Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. (**Applause**)

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable MP for St. Andrew South East.

**Hon. Emmalin Pierre:** You look concerned, Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, because you stand before I acknowledge you. I want... You can leave your light on and let me acknowledge you, please. I prefer that.

**Hon. Emmalin Pierre:** Mr. Speaker, sorry.

**Mr. Speaker:** I prefer, by simply pressing the light, and I would call you to stand.

**Hon. Emmalin Pierre:** Okay. You prefer that. I'll do what you prefer.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Member for St. Andrew South East, please stand.

**Hon. Emmalin Pierre:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise just to make a very brief comment on this Bill and just to start the commercial break that we just had there. Mr. Speaker, I am trying to make the connection now, but let's move on.

Mr. Speaker, to compare a marriage license with a D-Class driving license, let's

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get back to the seriousness of this. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when I reviewed this Bill, I had made up my mind that I could not support this, and that is because I was of the impression that the reference was to a D1 license. The explanation that was given by the Honourable Prime Minister makes reference to D-Class, so one is able to move from B to D. So I am not as concerned as I was yesterday when I studied the document that was sent. But it doesn't take away some of my concerns which I wish to express and one of the things that I want to point out and to note specifically, Mr. Speaker, is that a B-Class and a D-Class vehicle are very different and it is quite obviously a reason why the law considered that in the past.

And so as we seek to change, we always want to bear in mind the broader context in everything that we refer to so not just being pro-youth, not just even being pro-business and those two if anybody who knows me would know I am pro-youth, pro-business but I am saying in whatever we do seriously in those cases we want to go a little bit deeper to analyse, to look at what are those things that we may want to consider in addition.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am curious because in the introductory presentation when the Bill was tabled, no reference was made to the research done before, statistics available from the Traffic Department that would have aided in the decision to bring this Bill before us, so that's the first thing that I thought about.

The second thing that crossed my mind was to what extent the Traffic Department was consulted on this, and how they feel about a piece of legislation like this. Because, as the Leader of His Majesty's Opposition would have stated, they would become very important in the implementation of any change that we make, and so to what extent was the Traffic Department consulted? To what extent was the insurance? I think we got the answer to this; the insurance companies were not consulted, and the intention is to consult them after.

I would have loved to hear that all the consultation was done prior to tabling of this Bill. But, Mr. Speaker, the part that concerns me most, that I think I still feel a bit of reservation, is the level of risk that is involved and let us not eliminate all of the risk involved by just our support for the sectors that we refer to.

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The size of the truck, the weight of the truck, obviously, it carries some additional risk that maybe a BB vehicle, and so it means that we have to consider what we now put in place to protect drivers, pedestrians. Earlier, it was said that young people and we know what the statistics generally show about young drivers, I heard about women, but in this case the Bill is not specific to women. If it was I would not be saying what I'm saying now, but it's specific to youth.

And so I'm saying that while we support there must be some kind of assurance that there's a system in place, there was sufficient consultation with those directly and those knowledgeable that we can feel comfortable that the risks would be significantly reduced for those who drive and those who ply the routes, those who are pedestrians and that is one of my concerns.

The removal of examinations is also a concern. I'm wondering if it was totally necessary to determine that this person is now ready in some way. Maybe we want to reduce the bottlenecks. Yes. But is there a way that we feel comfortable, so I totally understand a person in business who wants to, as the example was shared, but are we looking broader than just these people who have a justifiable need?

I am saying, Mr. Speaker, we ought not to blindly look at this. There is some risk involved. We have to consider that those people are not responsible, and we have to make sure that we are putting a system in place that is tight enough to protect everyone involved. Broadly speaking, as I said, I was more concerned about the D1-Class, but even with the D class, Mr. Speaker, moving from B to D must not be taken so lightly. Thank you. **(Applause)**

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

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, Mr. Speaker, that broadly there is support for the Bill. I will address the concerns raised by the Member of St. Andrew South East.

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Mr. Speaker, the Bill clearly says you have to be driving for five years to be able to get the upgrade. We didn't say anyone with a B-Class license could go to a D-Class license. We said you had to be driving for five years. We recognise the need to have the experience etcetera, etcetera, would allow you to get the upgrade. If we did not remove the limitation on the age from 25, Mr. Speaker, what it would mean is that at 23, if you got your license at 18 and at 23 you've been driving for five years, you're still disqualified because you're not 25. So the reality is that what we seeking to address.

Secondly, you actually have to... Mr. Speaker, if I walk out the door, there is a risk that the ceiling could fall on me. I don't know that there is anything that I can really do to protect myself from that. How many people actually have access to a D vehicle? The point is we want to make sure that the persons who have the D vehicles... someone doesn't buy a D vehicle because they want to drive a private motor car, Mr. Speaker. They buy a D vehicle because they are almost invariably involved in some type of business that requires a D vehicle. Whether it's a construction business, a goods business, or what have you. So, really, having the five-year limitation that you must first be driving for five years, if you're driving a B-Class vehicle.

Let's look at the C and C1. A C-Class vehicle is a light public service vehicle with a seating capacity for not more than 17 passengers. So if you're driving a vehicle that carries 17 passengers, it is essentially a long vehicle. It's a vehicle, obviously, that has seats, and so you're talking about the weight that the vehicle itself carries, plus the people who then sit on it. So you're essentially handling a significant-sized vehicle with significant responsibility.

A C1, heavy public service vehicle with seating capacity for more than 17 passengers, so we know the buses we have. We have the small Toyota-type mini buses, 17 and under, and you have the big buses, King Elvis, and so on, tend to use much bigger ones. Someone who is driving that bus or those buses after five years respectfully, Mr. Speaker, in my view, would invariably be far more responsible and far more experienced, having navigated the roads. And so, Mr. Speaker, in my view, after five years and being medically fit, I think... I don't know anything further we really need to do to minimise the

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risk. For someone who is driving a B, although it says light goods vehicle with a maximum gross weight of more than 7,000 kgs, the fact is that the pick-up in essence is an SUV without a covering at the back, which is the truth. If you line up any pick-up against almost any of the SUVs we have on the roads, they are almost of similar length.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are mindful of the need to minimise the risk associated with this, but I also want to say something that sometimes there is an underlying current that runs through our legislation that comes all the way back from our colonial past, and sometimes we have to accept that. We have to stare at what is written and ask why it is written. A lot of the time, instead of passing legislation that is enabling, that is supporting, that is encouraging, we pass legislation that is punitive, prohibitive, restrictive and discouraging. I appreciate that there is a risk associated with a motor vehicle, and if not handled properly, it could be lethal. But a motor vehicle is not a gun, a gun is designed to be lethal. A motor vehicle is a tool to achieve something, and so we need to find a way to encourage the mind set shift that it is not a prohibition or a punishment for getting your driver's license, but that is a skill or tool that almost every Grenadian at 18 should almost, automatically aspire to achieve. **(Applause)**

And I say this, Mr. Speaker, because we may not want to talk about it. If you ask the average Grenadian what their experience with getting a driver's license is, it is horrible. You're made to feel as if you should not even aspire to learn to drive. There is a difference in teaching you to make sure that you engage in defensive driving, that you understand the risk associated with being put in charge of a vehicle, but often times, Mr. Speaker, what is put in your way is hurdle upon hurdle upon hurdle.

I learn to drive in Grenada, Trinidad and Barbados. I can tell you the difference in the attitude even when you do the exams. When I was in Trinidad, the examiner would say to me, "This is a busy intersection. If you are not a little more aggressive and put your head out, no vehicle would ever allow you to pass". In Grenada, they would sit there and watch you **(laughter)** and you're on your own. The same thing happened in Barbados, so I actually got my license in Trinidad and Barbados because it was encouraging. They're told this is not a test in nervousness because obviously you're

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nervous, you don't want to fail, so they said to you, relax, you're going to get through, just take your time and do what you have to do.

So, I am saying, Mr. Speaker, yes, we have to minimise the risk. I certainly like the suggestion that all of us perhaps need to engage in mandatory defensive driving after we've gotten our licenses for a certain period of time to curb the aggression and so on that's on the road.

But I also want to applaud all of the Members for supporting the Bill because I really do think we have to be more encouraging and more supportive of ensuring that things that is a basic skill like learning to drive is something we encourage all our young persons to aspire to do by the time they reach 18 years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Question proposed.**

**Bill read a second time.**

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I need to remind myself to wait till you call me.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes. Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 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.

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**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.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for the first reading, a bill for an Act, shortly entitled, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

**Clerk:** A Bill which seeks to amend the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, No. 39 of 2014 ("the principal Act") to extend the non-application of the principal Act to the procurement of goods, works or services up to the sum of

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\$100,000.00, shortly entitled, Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

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

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Relevant Standing Order suspended.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister, your light.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Bill seeks to amend the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act and specifically only one section. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I did not realise. I beg to move the second reading of the Bill.

**Question put.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Bill seeks to amend the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act No.39 of 2014 and specifically only one section and specifically, Mr. Speaker, one numbering.

The current Act section 4(2), Mr. Speaker, says that the Act does not apply to the procurement of goods, works or services under EC\$15,000. The Bill is seeking to amend this section of the Act to substitute the \$15,000 to \$100,000. Mr. Speaker, the other parts of that same section 4(2) goes onto other exceptions or circumstances in which the public procurement and public property does not apply, but we are not seeking to in any way,

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shape or form to amend or alter those other exceptions, but only the threshold by which the Act automatically applies.

Mr. Speaker, when I became the Prime Minister, I got a report from the Ministry of Infrastructure, and it showed a large number of contracts had been issued by the Ministry for just under EC\$14,999, EC\$14,995. It went on and on, and in many instances, Mr. Speaker, it was clear that it was for the same geographic areas of work. So it was clear, Mr. Speaker, even the then administration was struggling with the limitations placed on the need to go through, in some instances, the public procurement requirements of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act.

And so what was done was that artificial divisions, if you want to put it that way, were made to the procurement of goods or services, particularly infrastructure-type services, to be able to, I would use the word “not run afoul” of the requirements of the Public Procurement and Disposal Act. Mr. Speaker, having reviewed the matter, having discussed the matter with the various ministries, Ministry of Finance it is clear that this Act was passed in 2014, 10 years ago and that there is a need to in fact revise the threshold under which the sometimes extensive requirements of the procurement Act are required to comply with in order to often times procure simple goods.

I cite infrastructure as one, Mr. Speaker, because it is probably highly probable that you can do infrastructure-type works, and it would cost you EC\$15,000. Between the material for cement, sand and gravel, aggregates and all that comes with it, truckage, etcetera., the likelihood that it would be EC\$15,000, then you have to add labour to that, and you have to add shortages and so on.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we import sand. We import cement. We import steel. We import BRC all of those things are not in the control of even the persons who are importing them and so today you may get a quote that says the sand is EC\$10.00 and if you can't or don't have the money to buy it now and you come back a month later, well it's a new batch of sand that came in, the freight went up, the price goes up or it may go down and you have all of those variables. So, Mr. Speaker, what the Bill is seeking to do is to increase the threshold which at this point in time 10 years later is significantly

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inadequate to facilitate the procurement of goods for often times what a straightforward and simple matters without having to go through the lengthy and protracted procurement process set out by the Public

Procurement Act. So it gives the accountable officer the opportunity at least to authorise the procurement of goods and services up to EC\$100,000 without having to go through the existing procurement procedures that are there.

This should, Mr. Speaker, allow for faster turnaround time in terms of the procurement of goods and services and for the Government to be able to respond in a much more efficient manner to particularly some of the small-scale procurement that is required, and so this is why the limit is at EC\$100,000. And we recognise anything beyond that obviously would start bordering into medium to larger scheme procurement and obviously the need to make sure that the requirements of the Act are complied with would remain enforced. So, Mr. Speaker, I commend the Bill to the Honourable Members and seek their support. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

**Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, I understand the point that the Honourable Prime Minister and, of course, the mover of this Bill were making with respect to the EC\$15,000 limit and the problem that was experienced. But let me caution the Prime Minister with probably good intentions about what he is talking about, because we faced that in Government too, that there are persons who are doing contracts who would want you to increase the limit as much as possible. We had that kind of pressure in Government.

But you see, you have to be careful because of these conditions. If you raise it as far as EC\$100,000, that means all these conditions here, the persons wouldn't have to meet that at all. For example, they have to fulfil their obligation to pay all required taxes and contributions to Grenada. In other words, people could be getting contracts for

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EC\$100,000, and they owe the Inland Revenue and other parts of the Government Department a pile of taxes, and nothing stops the Government or the institution from giving another EC\$100,000 contract to the same individual for another activity. So you could have a person making several hundred thousand dollar contracts, like you have had in the past, of EC\$15,000 and not having met the fundamental obligation to the taxpayers.

So I think one has to be very careful with even with intentions as mentioned. For example, a condition the person must have the necessary professional, technical, financial and managerial qualifications, the capabilities, resources, equipment and facilities to perform these contracts. That means they don't have to have those conditions at all. In other words, the person making a contract of EC\$15,000 or less didn't have to meet those conditions. There are a number of conditions and requirements under the procurement Act which in my mind going to EC\$100,000, I could understand the movement to a higher level, but I think a hundred thousand may put the Government itself in some serious problems.

I am warning of that possibility, and therefore, it would be difficult for me to support going up as far as EC\$100,000. I could see some increase, but EC\$100,000, I think, is a massive jump and that, in fact, can be very problematic for the Government itself going forward, because I know some people may want to push you to give them several contracts, and you may end up with some problems. The question of accountability, the question of transparency, all these things come into play, and I am urging the Government to think twice.

The level of this that you intend to go to EC\$100,000, it will be difficult for me to give my support to EC\$100,000, while I understand the intentions of the Government to deal with the problems that we ourselves experienced. I think EC\$100,000 is a big jump, and it will be difficult for me. I recognise the problem, but my difficulty is that the sizable increase will pose a problem.

Colleagues, let me tell you this. If we see this passed and we see certain things going on, we will make noises about it, yes, we will, as the Opposition, we will take

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advantage of that. I cannot sit here and support it, and then I see the problem occurring and start to open my mouth. So I am just urging you to be careful, and I am sure my other colleagues may want to add their own piece as far as this Procurement Act is concerned. I urge the Government to be very careful.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition. Is it MP for St. Patrick East?

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give my full support to the Bill as presented, and again, we are looking at the simple amendment of moving the sealing for the contracts from EC\$15,000 to EC\$100,000. Now, while, for example, EC\$15,000 over 10 years is outdated, and I think we are living in times where we need to be more proactive in these things, I believe we have to take into consideration certain things. The EC\$15,000 allowed a number of persons who were not even qualified contractors to get roads that they had never been able to build.

We have situations where you have, let's say, a mile of road, you have three or four different persons getting an EC\$15,000 contract on that road. The quality of the road at the end of the day is not what we wanted. I have been to some places. I have seen what you call retaining walls, and I have never seen in my entire life a zig-zag on those retaining walls. What we find happening is this: those guys that get these contracts, they couldn't go to the bank to get any upfront monies and so on, because they didn't have resources. They had to come to the same Ministry of Infrastructure to get a letter to go to the bank, basically allowing them to be able to at least conduct their business. In some cases, we had to basically allow them to be able to at least deposit their monies directly into the banks to be able to do what they are doing. I must say that some of the work that we got from that was very unsatisfactory.

I am not saying by moving it to EC\$100,000 would change. I am not saying that, but what I am saying also is this: we have seen situations where people believe that they can get a contract, they don't have an NIS number, and they don't have a tax number.

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How would they be able to pay tax? Even when we look at some of the small contractors and so on, we still have difficulty in getting people to understand that, when Government say to you that for you to be able to get a contract from the Government, you need to have your NIS number, you need to have your tax number because once you talk about tax number they feel that you are going to tax them. A lot of us do not understand in Grenada that if a contractor is not making a certain threshold in profit, he is not liable to pay tax, and those figures are about EC\$300,000 at this point in time. So, therefore, I believe that when we make...

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable MP, just hold.

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** ...when we make....

**Mr. Speaker:** Just hold...

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** ...when we make....

**Mr. Speaker:** Just hold Honourable MP.

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** Sure.

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed, please, Honourable MP.

**Hon. Dennis Cornwall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I was saying. When we make blank statements about the amounts and taxes that are not paid, and so on, there might have been a rationale for not paying the tax, because if you don't have a tax number, you cannot pay tax. But then to be given a contract and given facilities whereby you can go to the bank with a letter saying we have been given that by the Ministry of Infrastructure, so their money can go to a particular account, so that they can get whatever

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facilities and so on. I am saying that whereas we are trying to basically improve on the amount and improve on the quality of the projects that we implement.

We are also saying that for a contractor to be able to at least conduct the work he has to do his part also which is register for a tax number, have his NIS number because some of these guys, they do not pay NIS on behalf of their workers which again is a dissatisfaction on that particular mandate that we have to make sure that people pay their NIS for their workers when they are conducting business.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would speak no rationale why I think this change is good but we have to ensure that those who get those contracts are in compliance with the law, that is to have your tax number, have your NIS number and to pay the NIS for your workers as well as other compliance issues that we have been faced in the past and I believe that we will be able to move this out.

There is another issue about whether or not this could lead to chaos, or wastage, and so on. I believe if we enforce that the people who we are getting to do those contracts are accountable and make sure they do what they have to do, and so on, we would have less wastage and we would have greater compliance. I thank you. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Patrick East. Honourable MP for St. Andrew South West.

**Hon. Lennox Andrews:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of this Bill and I do so for two main reasons.

The first is that, Mr. Speaker, EC\$15,000 in contemporary times can in fact do very little in the area of construction. Certainly, EC\$15,000 cannot build a length of road, let's say as long as a cricket pitch, so then it would be incomplete. Mr. Speaker, in the last four or five years or so, due to uncertainty in supply, the whole world has in fact seen a substantial increase in prices, and of course, to be more specific, in the cost of building material, and that of course applies to Grenada as well.

Mr. Speaker, I was reading a report from the National Association of Home Owners

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of the USA and they were commenting on how building material cost would have increased in the last four years and it applies to material like when you mix concrete, steel products, lumber, all of these are very important for construction. What they noted, Mr. Speaker, is that in 2020, building material costs went up by 3.8%. In 2021, they went up by 14.1%. In 2022, by 4.3%, in 2023, and by 0.8% in 2023. So there has been, Mr. Speaker, a rise in the cost of building materials; in Grenada today, a sling of cement will cost close to EC\$500.00. So, to really achieve quality work in the area of construction, that EC\$15,000 does not reflect the present realities as regards the cost of building materials in the world today, and of course, in Grenada.

The second issue is that the increase, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you, does not mean that this Administration is reckless. Mr. Speaker, we will put systems and structures in place to ensure that the object of this Act would be maintained so we will continue to promote the public interest by prescribing to the concept of good governance which means accountability, which means transparency, which means integrity and which means that we will always ensure that we get value for money when we do our public procurement.

And therefore, I want to indicate to the "Other Side" that your concern relative to the increase, we take on board. We are aware of that, but certainly the wastage and the inefficiencies that we have seen we are going to put systems and structures in place to ensure that those monies are monies well spent and that the Government and that the people of this country get value for money as we increase that threshold from EC\$15,000 to EC\$100,000. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew South West. I now invite the MP for St. Andrew North East to make her contribution.

**Hon. Kate Lewis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this Bill and to state upfront that I cannot support it.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, we must acknowledge that, of course, there has been indeed

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a rise in the cost of materials over the years, so an increase is expected, but from EC\$15,000 to EC\$100,000, I think it's a massive jump. Now, what we have to factor in here, Mr. Speaker, and I think that point is being missed, is not the quality of work that you will get, but the procedure for handing out or getting the ones to provide the services, the procedure to be used.

Now, we're moving from a procurement law system to a single-source system. So, whereas in the past that you could only sole source services up to EC\$15,000 which means that whoever is being sole sourced may not have been tax compliant as stated, but when you're moving that from EC\$15,000 to EC\$100,000 it is exposing those contractors themselves or service providers themselves to being corrupt because they are not being looked at for the ability of them to do be able to do the work, their qualifications and experience in terms of the service. We have to be real. It means that those involved will have the ability to identify friends, family, political supporters, activists of the party, to say, here is a contract up to EC\$100,000. That is what it is saying here, because sole sourcing is what is happening here, up to EC\$100,000.

Now, when it was restricted to EC\$15,000 it restricted the ability of the amount of wastage of taxpayers' resources. Now we're increasing that to EC\$100,000, we must not miss the point that this is giving those involved the ability to sole-source up to EC\$100,000 without having to go through the procurement rules. It does not speak to the ability to get the job done, so we have to be careful here, Mr. Speaker, and that is why I am not able to support this.

I am saying there is a need. We have seen the increase in aggregate materials, and so for infrastructural work, we have seen that. So, there is a need to increase it from EC\$15,000 to let's say maybe EC\$30,000, but EC\$100,000, Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a big jump. What measures are in place to ensure that proper accountability structures will be there? What measures will be in place to ensure that it will be done, Mr. Speaker? We have to be very careful with this, and as alluded to earlier, it may seem fancy now, but it's a word of caution to those who are bringing this forward here that the amount should be reconsidered downwards. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

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**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North East. Is it the MP for St. George North East?

**Hon. Ron Redhead:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give full support to this Bill this afternoon.

I believe that it is progressive and it will help to improve the quality of work, construction services, which will be required by the Government of Grenada, so that taxpayers' resources can be used in a more organised and better way.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. Currently, Mr. Speaker, let us say a piece of road costs EC\$80,000 to complete. With the present situation, you would have to cut that project up into 15 or fewer bits. What this will do is that it opens up that very project to piecemeal work whereby this month they finish one piece, next month they finish another piece, etc. and given what has happened over the last three to four years in particular, as it relates to the cost of materials going up.

We believe that this is detrimental. One such project that the former administration certainly would know off is what is currently ongoing in Willis where this contract was awarded, and while this has nothing to do with the cost of the contract, but the situation is similar where cost of materials increased exponentially and in some instances interfere with the ability of this contract to move forward. Now that aside, that is not the only reason that we may get to at a later stage, but, Mr. Speaker, in particular, what this will help to do is to narrow down the gaps.

It is interesting that I heard the comments coming from our Honourable Members from His Majesty's Opposition about if anything goes wrong, we are going to speak about it. I applaud you on that, and in fact, I would say that any Member of Parliament, if they see anything where Government resources, taxpayers' resources, are being spent incorrectly, should raise the matter and go to the media. Do what you have to do to be able to ensure that taxpayer's money is going to be spent correctly, but not too far from now in 2022, I could give practical examples in my constituency where I see spending to the extent of EC\$280,000 resources coming from the National Lottery Authority, the Boca Playing field.

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If we were to talk about how we manage these projects now just because we're increasing the threshold from EC\$15,000 to EC\$100,000, we must also look at what has happened in the past and this is an issue, Mr. Speaker, which we have to look at boldly and let me draw an example. Presently, if a public servant has political leanings, it is incorrect. I don't know the exact law, so I can't speak of it now, for them to be actively involved in politics, openly doing so.

Now, if this is the case and we have something constraining that, the Constitution also says that they have a right to freedom of association. So, when we look at the legislation that we are passing, one must not look at it as so subjective that it only deals with the issue at hand. If you're moving it to EC\$100,000, it means more corruption could happen, etcetera, etcetera.

The Government is not about that, Mr. Speaker. What we see is the opportunity to advance work throughout the length and breadth of Grenada. Again, I can speak about my constituency. A lot of projects were started. They were done. This EC\$15,000 sole sourcing was the order of the day, and I hear the Honourable Members on the "Other Side" speaking about what is killing the Ministry of Works is MIT and whatever other process, social development, community development, that's totally not true.

There were special projects during your time. This same EC\$15,000 was ruthlessly utilised, certainly leading up to the last general elections. I didn't hear you comment about that. So we must be responsible when we make these statements. I think the underlying issue that we are trying to solve with this is to say that, in an organised fashion, given the fact that materials have increased. If we want a proper project to be completed and managed properly, the ability to sole-source up to EC\$15,000, which is the new threshold is \$100,000 should be increased.

We have not as Honourable Prime Minister mentioned changed the regulations as it relates to how one would get a contract and I can speak for this administration, certainly a soca artiste is not the person we are giving to build a road as obtained in the past by the former administration and therefore when one talks about how we are going to spend more money to do more work and better work. We must look at ourselves in the mirror

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too and try to understand what this is resolving. We are not saying that contractors are going to get loose. In fact, this would provide an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, for contractors to now prepare proper quantity surveys. Honourable Minister for Finance, you could correct me if I am wrong, most of the small contractors with the \$15,000 right now can't even do that and therefore can't bid for anything higher.

He heard about the rigorous rules beyond our shores, and so we need to start preparing the small contractors in Grenada to be able to bid for bigger projects. But how would they get the opportunity if we have an institutionalised mechanism of this little EC\$15,000 thing where all of them fighting like crabs in a barrel to see who gets the best EC\$15,000 and when you watch the work that they do its substandard, drain dancing, wall praising God and we can go on and on, poles in roads but work is completed.

Just the other day, the Opposition had a nice meeting up in a community talking about the MP and MP and MP, but nobody is making reference to what is going on and what they did and helped to do in terms of the state of construction in that community. We must take responsibility.

So what we are saying, Mr. Speaker, is that this is important because it opens up the whole opportunity for us to look at what is the cost or actual value for completing a project rather than looking only when election come about, give this little EC\$15,000 here, give that here and so on to do things. We have to get serious as a state, and I would say that the Opposition should not fear that more money is going to be potentially available for sole sourcing.

What we need to do is to ensure that the people who are getting the contracts are of standard, understand their responsibility and is willing to work in the interest of the community to be able to do a project properly, with quality and to ensure that we are not engaging in peace meal hap hazard type of development where we only deal with little contract here and there but we do something substantive to improve our community and see the benefit to all of our people.

So, Mr. Speaker, I do not think this is rocket science, while I understand the political opportunity for the opposition to say we don't support it and potentially promote, which I

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believe is imputing improper motive that we are increasing this and then more corruption, etcetera, that is not the case. What we are promoting is that this was obtained in the past because it happened under your watch as well, even though the procurement rules said EC\$15,000, contracts were given out in excess of that without the procurement rules being observed.

So what we are saying is that given the context of the increase in materials, given all the other contexts that we want to have a proper project in a community or village to be able to be completed, this is a fundamental requirement that we must pass. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Honourable MP for St. George North East, and I now invite the Honourable MP for St. Mark to take the floor.

**Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste-Curwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my comments on the Bill as presented by the Member for St. David and Prime Minister of Grenada.

Mr. Speaker, it is very obvious with the increase in cost of materials, aggregate, whatever, we have passed the time for the EC\$15,000 projects, and we need to look at a new figure. Mr. Speaker, my first comment on that is that we must not knock the EC\$15,000 contracts as I heard being so severely knocked by the Member for St. George North-East.

Mr. Speaker, because that allowed a lot of small projects and a lot of people in villages and in communities benefited from that, doing small pathways, doing grills over deep drains or gutters, and a number of villages and villagers benefited from that. And it worked in a number of cases. There might have been inconsistencies, things that needed to be addressed and there will be even when you put it to EC\$100,000 and when you do not have a tenders board that is going to look at individual who has been recommended for a project, then certainly the Government has less control over EC\$100,000 as compared to EC\$15,000.

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So yes, we can all attest, and every village, and my sister on the “Other Side”, I am sure she can agree if she finds her voice to say so, that the EC\$15,000 benefited a lot of the constituents. However, I would say categorically that we passed that time. EC\$15,000 cannot do what it did before, and I agree wholeheartedly with an increase.

I do not agree with the EC\$100,000, simply because I think a tender board would provide more checks and balances for that quantity of money. However, I do agree that there needs to be an increase, and of course, it will be up to the Government and the “Government Side” to decide the quantity. I would have liked to see less, but I want to say to the small contractors, through you, Mr. Speaker, who do not have a voice here that many of them did an excellent job and I want to encourage them to continue and to hope and pray that when it reaches to \$100,000. One or two of them would get jobs because once you do a job under NNP, you are labelled and you are marginalised, and that is a reality, and I am hoping that some of them who have done good jobs would be looked at and be given an equal opportunity as others. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for the constituency of St. Mark. Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I obviously commend those Members of the House who have supported the Bill without reservation and those who are querying the quantum.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure we're clear. The Procurement Act is also still very clear on what needs to happen for contracts below the threshold. You still have to have a tendering process. The accounting officer or Permanent Secretary still has to conduct the tendering opening, still has to tender the evaluation report, still have to make recommendation for award of contracts and depending on what is required may still have to submit these reports to the procurement board and Cabinet or to other boards as required.

So the challenge we face, and I think that's why I think our colleague accepts that

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EC\$15,000 is inadequate, and no one is knocking the EC\$15,000. The fact that I started off by highlighting how many of them were issued oftentimes for the same geographic location is a recognition that it was a handicap and perhaps, not the best handicap in all of the circumstances.

Right, and therefore, we should not bury our heads in the sand and say well, the loss was EC\$15,000 when we are the lawmakers and not seek to ensure that we have greater efficiencies and that contractors themselves are not frustrated while they come to bid for 200 feet of roads is EC\$30,000 or EC\$32,000 and then we tell them well sorry we have to go and tender now if you want to get the entire thing done when that's the person who is best able to do the job you then have to say well okay, we then have to go through an elaborate tendering process that requires multiple competitive bidding, then an evaluation report, and then sending it to the Procurement Board.

We have to understand how these boards operate, let's be honest, the Procurement Board is made up of the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, the Attorney General and other members appointed, all of whom are busy people and so sometimes even getting them to sit in a meeting or to fix their schedule so that they can consider those things could be a challenge. Sometimes you there waiting two or three weeks, and they may have questions about it, the questions go then they come back and you find yourself in a situation where six months have passed and you are awaiting approval, contractor hoping he can get the contract, rates are going up and then when we finish everybody is dissatisfied.

So it is simply meant to say, let us raise the threshold. The controls that would have applied even for someone who was doing 15,000 and under are still applicable. And so the raising of the threshold is not to be equated with sole sourcing. **(Applause)** Because even for contracts that are above the threshold, depending on the circumstances, the Act actually still allow sole-sourcing, depending on the circumstances, that's the first thing.

And second, there are circumstances in Grenada where there is only one person who can do something, and we can take major road construction, for example, Mr.

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Speaker. If you can do major roads, how many people have the capacity in terms of the equipment and so on to do it? It's one or two companies. Right, so invariably you'll literally go to two of them and say bid because you're advertising for something that the rest of the public simply can treat with.

So this is merely meant to ameliorate the challenge of having a very low threshold that makes it very difficult and very frustrating for the very said contractors you want to hire to be able to be hired and to get the work done. And there are lots of other things we need to get done as we go along, Mr. Speaker, to help and improve the ability of the contractors to be able to deliver for us.

You know a good example... I think we all know construction and contractors generally don't have cash. They generally go on working capital. So sometimes even when you give them the contract, they can't start, they have to go to the bank with the contract, mortgage their house, mortgage what they have, to get some cash to be able to even start the project. So even... Those are some of the areas that we have to look at. With big contractors, yes, they may provide a performance bond, they might provide security, but we give them advanced payments, you give them mobilisation fees and with small contractors they don't have advanced payments, they don't have mobilisation fees. So even though they have the contracts, if the banks aren't prepared to fund them, they still can't deliver the contract for us.

So, I appreciate that we have to ensure that with the increasing of the thresholds the controls are in place to make sure that there is proper accountability, there are proper checks and balances, but the legislation explicitly addresses that. The accounting officer is the Permanent Secretary. They are required to have the evaluation committees set up in the various Ministries and to still be able to go through the processes where if the circumstances warrant it and they have multiple persons who can do the job to engage in comparative bidding so that you get the best value for money. There may be incenses when you have to sole source because there's just no one else to do the job and you negotiate down the price as the case may be.

But we certainly appreciate the need for caution in making sure that the checks

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and balances are in place to prevent any suggestion that people can simply issue contracts worth EC\$100,000 or sole-source them simply because the threshold has been increased. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Bill read a second time.**

**Clerk:** A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** 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.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Members, I have to report that the Bill was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without any amendments. Honourable Prime Minister.

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

**Question put and agreed to.**

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**Chairman's Report adopted.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Bill be read a third time.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Bill read a third time and passed.**

**Clerk:** A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for the first reading a Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Firearms (Amendment) Act, 2024.

**Clerk:** A Bill which seeks to amend the Firearms Act, Chapter 105, to empower the Minister to declare by Order, subject to affirmative resolution, a firearms amnesty in Grenada, or any part thereof, shortly entitled, Firearms (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

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

**Question proposed.**

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**Mr. Speaker:** No, is this for the first reading, Honourable Prime Minister?

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Relevant Standing Order suspended.**

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

**Question proposed.**

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Bill seeks to amend the Firearms Act to permit the Minister responsible for Home Affairs and National Security by the Statutory Rules and Orders to make an order that would grant an amnesty from prosecution for persons who during the period of the amnesty are found to be in possession of illegal firearms and ammunitions, or what will be called the, "Amnesty period".

So currently, Mr. Speaker, although the Act makes reference to the Minister having responsibility or the ability within any district, local or parish of Grenada to ask persons to deliver up firearms to the police or any other authorised persons and if they fail to do so it creates an offence, the current legislation does not, in fact, permit the Minister or grant the Minister the ability to, in fact, grant an amnesty from being prosecuted if someone is found in possession of a firearm or ammunition that is illegal. And, illegal in the context here of not being a firearm for which a permit or license is issued by the relevant authority, the Commission of Police or for which otherwise the Firearms Act permits someone to have.

So the intent, Mr. Speaker, is to permit the Minister to, in fact, make an order to establish an amnesty period within which persons or during which time, sorry, persons would be encouraged, incentivised to deliver to the police or to the police stations firearms and ammunition which are in their unlawful possession. And if someone were to take advantage of the amnesty by delivering the firearm or the ammunition, which is not a

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licensed or legal firearm, then that person would be granted an indemnity from prosecution during that period. So, Mr. Speaker, the Bill seeks to give the Minister the power to make the order, but I will go further to say that the parameters of the order are also, in essence, being controlled.

So the order or the amnesty period, which is envisaged, will not go beyond 90 days. A person or individual will be allowed to surrender the firearm or the ammunition anonymously. A personal individual would be permitted, if they so desire, to hand over the firearm or ammunition to their attorney at law, and their attorney would be permitted to deliver the firearm and ammunition to the police station. The SR&O, once enacted, will allow for the Commission of Police to designate, through the Minister, the places where the firearms are to be handed over, who is the authorizer or designated police officer to whom it should be handed over, and the receptacle in which the firearm or the ammunition is to be placed.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of illegal and awful firearms is a troubling and vexing one and has the potential and ability to significantly derail and destroy our peaceful way of life and our socioeconomic development. I don't need to quote the statistics from Haiti in the north, Jamaica in the north, the Bahamas in the north, to St. Lucia, our immediate neighbours, to Trinidad and Tobago, our more immediate neighbours, as to the devastating consequences of firearms and particularly unlawful firearms in these countries.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Grenada Police Force has devoted an enormous amount of time and effort to taking off the streets unlawful and illegal firearms. And I want to take this opportunity to publicly and formally commend and complement our hard-working men and women of the Royal Grenada Police Force for the tremendous effort that they have shown in tackling and confiscating illegal firearms in Grenada. And many times, when nothing happens, nobody praises anybody, the minute something goes wrong, all hell breaks loose.

So, I want to share some statistics, Mr. Speaker. In 2023, the Royal Grenada Police Force confiscated 30 unlawful or illegal firearms, that's in 2023. In 2022, let me

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get the right figure... So I will start back from 2019 because it will perhaps provide some context, so we understand where we are heading.

In 2019, they confiscated 13 unlawful firearms, ranging from 9-millimetre pistols to Smith and Wesson 0.40 pistols, to the Glock 17 pistols, the Glock 23 pistols, and the Taurus 13 in 1019.

In 2020, even in the midst of COVID-19 and a pandemic, they recovered 10 firearms. So I want to be counting, Mr. Speaker, 2019, 13; 2020, 10. Examples of firearms recovered include a 12-gauge Remington 870 Magnum Shotgun, a Smith & Wesson firearm, and the Burton.

In 2021, they recovered 4, including a semi-automatic pistol. In 2022, they recovered 11, ranging from Revolvers, again including Smith & Wesson and Glock, totalling 11 in 2022. In 2023, they recovered 30. The numbers almost tripled.

So in 2022, we had 11, in 2021 we had four, in 2020 we had 10, and in 2019 we had 13. So the total number of seizures over the period, Mr. Speaker, is 68, between 2019 and 2022, with 2023 seeing the largest seizure almost doubling, almost tripling, in some instances, any of the previous years.

So I want to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to commend the Royal Grenada Police Force (**applause**) on the significant effort to remove illegal and unlawful firearms from our society and community. And as I said, I think two Mondays back, Mr. Speaker, we, the members of the public, need to give the members of the Royal Grenada Police Force the opportunity to conduct their work without becoming a humbug and without becoming a public nuisance. And I say this, Mr. Speaker, because I did not ask for the statistics for 2024 because we're only in March, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that already in 2024, just based on periodic reports from the police, the number is already 10 or 11 firearms that have been recovered.

Over the weekend or the week when everyone was in an uproar over the escaped prisoners, that same week, the Royal Grenada Police Force was hard at work, and they recovered three firearms: one in Grand Anse, two in the Four Road area. Two weeks later, they intercepted in Telescope; less than a week ago, they intercepted in Fontenoy.

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So you see, your safety isn't after an event happens, by then you've lost... Your safety isn't after a shooting. Your safety is to prevent the shooting, to prevent the presence and use of unlawful firearms in our communities.

As so the Royal Grenada Police Force has been hard at work and we owe a debt of gratitude because with the 68 firearms and counting between 2019 and now that is off the street it means the risk of someone's life and limb being injured, maimed or worse yet, killed, has been reduced by at least 68 times. And oftentimes, these firearms are being confiscated in public places. In the incident in Grand Anse, the police had to conduct a public roadblock, and the accused was on a public omnibus with a firearm. So, imagine the catastrophic consequences that would've happened if you chose to discharge that firearm on a public service vehicle.

So, Mr. Speaker, tremendous resources, time, effort, intelligence and at-risk to their own lives are being undertaken by law enforcement in the pursuit of removing illegal and unlawful firearms off the street.

And so, Mr. Speaker, as we announced, the onus is on us to do everything that we can to support and encourage the Royal Grenada Police Force in that regard. **(Applause)** Therefore, we are seeking to give the Minister the power to have this amnesty so that we can embark upon an aggressive campaign of education, particularly amongst our young men to discourage them from seeing firearms as something that is "sexy", or that something this is mature, or that something that makes you feel as though you are the bigger man because the outcomes are inevitable and guaranteed, you will either kill somebody, you will kill yourself, you will maim somebody, you will main yourself and usually in the words of Tallpre, "The grave, the jail and the hospital". And it may happen in any number of orders, hospital, jail or grave... Well, if you go grave first **(laughter)**, you don't have to worry about the other two.

So, Mr. Speaker, we want to have a period of respite where persons who've gotten the message and who understand that this is not a life to pursue, that there is no upside to having a firearm, that in our beautiful, peaceful island where we should guard jealously public safety, peace, tranquillity, those who've gotten that message but may find

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themselves on the wrong side of the law because they regrettably, prior to getting the message might have thought it a good or useful thing to carry an unlicensed or an unlawful firearm. We want to give them the opportunity to come forward and to surrender the firearm and the ammunition without the risk of prosecution. And so, Mr. Speaker, that in essence is what this is designed to do.

And so, of course, if they are coming forward to surrender or to hand over the firearm or ammunition, it means it is less work, time, effort and resources for the hardworking men and women of the Royal Grenada Police Force. But we also want to say that the amnesty is not going to last forever and that after the amnesty, the intent, Mr. Speaker, is to further amend the Firearms Act, so we'll be back here to significantly increase the minimum penalties for firearms, ammunition and firearm-related crimes.

So I want to repeat, Mr. Speaker, it is an opportunity for those who have unlawful or illegal firearms in their possession to hand them over and get away "scot-free", as we will put it this way, without the fear of being prosecuted. But if that opportunity is not taken and if subsequently, after the law is amended to increase the penalties, obviously, you are on your own, you'll be left with my Honourable friend from the Town of St. George to plead on your behalf.

But, Mr. Speaker, you see laws should reflect values and values and we have to send the message that the gun culture that the glorification of guns, the possession of guns and ammunition is not our values, it is not to be encouraged, it is not to be supported, the consequences are obvious. If we look at Eagle to our north, a place that encourages and supports and talks about the First Amendment and the right to carry firearms and so on, what has it led to? It has led to their children at three, four and five years old having to do active shooter drills. So when you send your child to school, part of what they're being taught is how to behave when a gunman armed with a high-powered semi-automatic or automatic rifle is wantonly killing innocent children. You're not going to learn about great black history, and the creation of the pyramids, or the great civilisation of the Aztecs or any of those things. They're teaching you how to duck and go below a table and how to say active shooter. And that's where all the guns are coming from, that's

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where all the guns are coming from.

So, Mr. Speaker, both at an individual and at a regional level, CARICOM has been lobbying our friends in the United States about the need to take serious measures to curtail the exportation of guns to the Caribbean. The Caribbean has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. We are, to some extent, for now, thankfully protected from that. But, the Caribbean as a whole, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, I'm talking English speaking here, we are not getting to Central and South America, we are not counting Haiti in this, has some of the highest homicide rates per capita in the world and they're all gun-related homicides. So, if we love this beautiful little island, if you want to preserve the Grenadian way of life for 50 years, Mr. Speaker, firearms cannot be something that should be tolerated and encouraged.

We respect the separation of powers, and we respect that it is for the judges to sentence, but the judges and the magistracy live in this society and they too need to understand that when a person has a firearm that is illegal and they lose it they are not distinguishing between whether they are a member of the executive or they are a member of the legislative or a member the judiciary. They are not distinguishing between whether you support the yellow party, the green party or the red party.

And so the message must be sent both in our legislation, in our sentencing, and in the amount of effort and resources we give law enforcement to make sure that they interdict, confiscate and seize unlawful firearms. Guns were invented to do one thing, and that is to kill, that's the honest truth, Mr. Speaker.

So I want us to appreciate that this is a real problem, Mr. Speaker. Between 2022 and 2023, the police arrested and charged 78 persons for firearms and firearm-related offences; that's just two years, 2022 and 2023. What do you want a firearm to do? What's the intent?

So, Mr. Speaker, this will require a multifaceted approach. This is just one of the approaches; it is meant to be a short-term approach to encourage persons, irrespective of how they came into possession of the firearm or the ammunition, to hand it over to law enforcement. You do not have to worry about being prosecuted, you can remain

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anonymous, and you have the added protection of going to an Attorney at Law, once the SR&O is passed, to hand over the firearm to the Attorney at Law if you feel safer if you trust them more so that they can then turn it into the police. But as I said after the amnesty is over, Mr. Speaker, we intend to amend the legislation to reflect the fact that if you are found in possession of unlawful firearm or ammunition there should be condign consequences because this is not a value system that has any utility in a small peace-loading, close-knit island like Grenada.

And I would say this, if we do not have public safety and security, forget the economic development, forget the social development. A country that does not have public safety and security where people can go about their business without looking behind their backs is bound to be stymied, and eventually, it will implode.

So, Mr. Speaker, I trust that we would all support the Bill. There are other countries in which amnesties have been tried. We are not in any way suggesting it may not work; nobody may come and hand over a firearm, but they cannot say that an opportunity was not given to them to do so. So when the stiffer penalties and the longer sentences... And I know the Criminal Defence Attorneys always talk about a man's right to liberty, but, Mr. Speaker, we can't have people being arrested with five and six firearms in their possession after the police have done enormous work to confiscate it, get it off the street and then you put them right back on the street.

The message we're sending to victims and to the police is that their work doesn't mean anything and that the liberty of the criminal is more important than the well-being and the safety of society, or the well-being and the safety of victims who suffer from gun crimes. That is not a value system, Mr. Speaker, that we ought to encourage. In places where it's been encouraged, the consequences have been disastrous.

And we have to appreciate that the movement of people also involves the movement of criminals. A lot of the firearms that have been confiscated in Grenada came from St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, as far north as Jamaica. So the police are doing their work, Mr. Speaker, it's not for them to come and brag and shout every time something happens and have a press conference. The immigration authorities are doing

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their work. We've had to deport several, no other way to describe them, "bad man", the rap sheet: for murder, shooting at police, and kidnapping, as long as from here to Mississippi, whether they are from Jamaica, Trinidad, etcetera.

So we've had to have heightened surveillance to make sure that we can keep our shores safe. So this is not, Mr. Speaker, in any way, shape, or form a matter that we should take lightly. There are those from outside of Grenada who seek to threaten the peace and tranquillity of Grenada by bringing in that same type of glorification of gun culture and putting the rights of the criminal above the rights of everybody else, and this is not something that we should encourage.

But as I've said, Mr. Speaker, this is an attempt to take the soft approach first for our citizens of Grenada, in particular our young. And I'm signalling, Mr. Speaker, in particular, our young men because you see when you look at the persons who've been arrested they are all men, all men, I've been searching to see if I saw "F" anywhere, I may have searched 10 times I said maybe by some aberration some female. Not a single one, Mr. Speaker. Not a single one. So, essentially, they're arming themselves to shoot each other or to shoot at the police when the police seek to actually protect them from themselves or save them from the others who are trying to shoot at them.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am in a sense making a more passionate plea that I'm presenting a Bill, Mr. Speaker, for us all collectively in Grenada to realise the public safety issue is not a political football. The public safety issue is not an issue to try and score political marks, who is the quickest to comment when something goes wrong or when the police may make a little mistake? We need to support our police. We need to strengthen them. We need to give the opportunity for training. We need to try, give them the material and the resources they need to work with. We need to professionalise them, and the public needs to give them the opportunity to conduct their policing when they're doing so.

And the policemen come from our communities; they're somebody's mother, somebody's father, somebody's brother, somebody's sister, somebody's aunt, cousin, etcetera. They're of us and they are for us. So, despite the one or two mistakes that have been made, they're not perfect and importantly, Mr. Speaker, when they've made

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their mistakes they've owned up to it, they haven't sought to hide it or cover it up or say they did not make a mistake, they've owned up to it and that is a hallmark of professionalism.

Mr. Speaker, and I want to commend the Commissioner of Police. **(Applause)** I want to commend the Commissioner of Police and his team. And, Mr. Speaker, the police force is not without significant challenges, from health challenges to building challenges to vehicle challenges, we can go on and on. There are things that... I will come back... I will end on the driving point, Mr. Speaker.

Because you see, a long time ago, I was in the Grenville Magistrate Court, and I was listening to some police prosecutors talking about getting their driver's license. So I was a little perplexed. I was like, so as a police officer, you don't have a special regime where you are trained, and as a member of the police force, you get your license? And they all started to laugh at me, and they said, "No". I said, "What do you mean?" So I said, well, I mean, as a police officer, I would think it would be part of the course that if you are a police officer, part of your training is that you learn to drive. And they said to me, no, no, no, no, no counsel, we have to go through like every other civilian and go and fight the grind and go through all the long sticks and the this and the that and your own brethren humiliating you **(laughter)** and telling you, you can't reverse and you can't do the sticks and whatever. And I sat there, and I mean I was completely dumbstruck, and then it occurred to me why sometimes, when I grew up in my village, when you call the police, they say, "Well, the driver is not there, so the police can't come".

It never occurred to me that the average police officer was not given the opportunity, as part of his police training, to acquire the skills of driving. If he doesn't go and do it on his own as a private civilian, "crapaud smoke he pipe". So the police used to have to hire people just to drive. So if the driver is not there, the vehicle is sitting there, and the police officers don't have the skills to drive, so they cannot come. So you see, when we criticise, you call the police and they don't come, do you know why? Do we understand why? Do you understand the deep-seated, prohibitive, restrictive type of culture rather than the enabling, encouraging culture that we had? Those things have to

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change.

If you want the police to be effective and efficient, we have to empower them and give them the skills. So we can't have a police force where you have to go and learn to drive on your own, no wonder then we have shortages of drivers, and the officers can't respond. They can't ride a bike, they weren't taught to ride a bike, if you don't go and learn on your own, too bad. I mean in 2024, Mr. Speaker.

So I am making this point to say you see if we do not sometimes peel back and review why we are how we are, or how we've turned out this way, why we've turned out this way, we wouldn't be able to fix it, we will not be able to fix it. So we have to pull back the blind, pull back the curtain and take a deep look at some of the challenges we face and why we face them. And it's not to blame anybody. The reality is that, oftentimes, we simply continue things we inherited since the days when Grenada was a colony, and we continue right up without asking ourselves why.

So, I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, I hope those who say the amnesty will not work, and that may be the case, but we have to try, and it is one of the tools. There are several others we need to simultaneously do and encourage; education is absolutely critical, social, community development, health, culture, the arts, and entertainment. We have to encourage our people to pursue positive values. In Ghana, Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the content of our music and the glorification of "badmanism" and all of these kinds of things. We have to expose positive values. Glorify Kirani James, glorify Alleyne Francique, glorify King Ajamu, etcetera, not some bad man out of Jamaica or want to be a bad man out of Trinidad.

So let us please, Mr. Speaker, I hope, support this as a tool to help the police to minimise the number of firearms that are in our communities and to ensure that we give an opportunity to young men in particular who may have fallen on the wrong side of the law to come in, hand the firearms over, hand the ammunition over, encourage their friends and others who may be in a similar predicament to step forward and hand the firearms over so that they can continue living a productive and successful life. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

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**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. MP for St. Andrew North West.

**Hon. Delma Thomas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the Firearm Amendment Bill as presented by the Member for St. David and Prime Minister. I believe, Mr. Speaker, this is a worthwhile legislative action as part of the Government's wider approach to tackling issues of either growing or likely to grow crimes in our society.

As it stands, Mr. Speaker, Grenada still has the lowest crime rate in the region **(applause)** and among the lowest in the world, but that undeniable fact does not allow us to sit on our laurels. The report in recent months and in recent weeks of gun incidents in our society is a reason to take stock, it's a real problem that calls for a real solution and so, Mr. Speaker, this Government has no intention of sitting idly by while in this case new vices and forces are threatening our country. Unless we all get a handle on the availability of guns and their use in local feuds, none of us will be safe. I say none of us will be safe. Only last week, gunmen went into a hospital in St. Vincent and shot a patient there, and a similar incident happened in a hospital in St. Kitts a few months ago.

Guns are increasingly used in the region to settle disputes, domestic disputes, business disputes, and drug disputes, among others. This government is advocating a comprehensive crime-fighting plan, and so we see that gun amnesty is part of it and indeed an important first step.

The level of gun crimes is skyrocketing to alarming levels in most parts of the Caribbean. It is of such concern that last year, regional leaders held a full summit on tackling crime in the region, most of it fuelled by the emerging gun culture. Guns are brought into many jurisdictions primarily from the United States, a matter that countries in the Caribbean and Latin America have taken up with the relevant US authorities.

And as we heard here today, these countries have begun working on initiatives that we all hope will stem the flow of these arms from the north to the south. Grenada is determined to do what it can and what it must to ensure greater security at the home front.

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Getting the guns off the streets is, therefore, a top priority for us.

Mr. Speaker, it is in this context and against this background that this Bill, this proposed legislative action, is before this House. We have no doubt that this initiative will have bipartisan support. I expect that this is a rare moment when we are all on “This Side”, and on the Opposition Side, where we have mothers, sisters, lawyers and long-serving lawmakers, will rally together in the National cause.

The issue of crime cannot be politicised and we all in this House will stand united against the sculch. Mr. Speaker, this is not a yellow or green or NNP or NDC issue. It is a national issue that calls for all of us to work together to deal with the issues that confront us. I thank you. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew North West. MP for the Town of St. George.

**Hon. Peter David:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the issue of gun violence is a very serious one, and I appreciate the comments made on the “Other Side” and the attempts being made to deal with this issue. I deal with it literally every day.

And the purpose of the amnesty, I'll just discuss the purpose first, and then we will go into some of the other issues related to it, is to try to reduce gun-related crimes. That is laudable, that is accepted. And the fact is, as the Prime Minister indicated, there has been a serious proliferation of crimes. The evidence is there for everybody to see. You don't have to come to the courts, and you don't have to listen to the news. It's all over, and there has been a public outcry. And as the Member for St. Andrew North West just said, this thing affects people on all sides.

Some people only see crime either by the criminal or the victim. There are victims on both sides of all these crimes. You should see the mothers who come crying for their sons who are involved in crime, affecting other young men who have mothers. So it is not a straightforward issue. It is an issue that the mothers of the criminals are working, and trying as they come begging us all the time to try to solve this problem.

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So the question is, is this a positive step? Sure, it is an absolute positive step. I think the Prime Minister mentioned that the fact is, there are some people who would question the effectiveness. Gun amnesties are not abnormal. They've happened, they've been tried, and they've been tried in Grenada before. It's not the first time we're having an amnesty. But I believe the main aspect of the positive nature of it is the fact that we are bringing it to the fore. It is being brought to the people through this proposition. Most people will tell you they don't believe, no, not most people quite a few people will tell you they don't think it will work and the Member indicated that maybe it will, maybe it wouldn't, but the fact is, we are here talking about the gun violence through the amnesty. There's a view that this is too late in coming. I don't share that view, but there are some people who believe that. I believe that it is, the issue is now highlighted, the issue of gun violence.

The main question, though, is whether this amnesty will solve the problem that we're facing with guns. Does it get to the underlying courses... And we will get to that. Will it reduce gun-related crimes? You see the aim of the amnesty, at least at this stage as the Member indicated, is to get to somebody who bought a gun illegally for maybe \$3,000, \$5,000 who is committing a criminal act in buying the gun to decide tomorrow morning I'm going to bring the gun and give it to you just because I want to give it to you because I am afraid that you will catch me next year. That is a proposition.

I'm not saying it doesn't make sense to do it, but I am saying it is a difficult proposition to get owners of illegal weapons to just voluntarily hand them over, thereby reducing the number of guns on the street. The question is, why would somebody do that? What... And you use the word, Member for St. David, what is the incentive? Now you propose the incentive to be that they will not go to jail for it when they bring it, but the only exposure they are getting there is if they decide to bring it. And I'm suggesting to the Member for St. David that while I agree with doing it because I'm advocating it, I think we should not be too optimistic that at this stage that alone, and I know you didn't suggest this is alone, but that alone will not take guns off the streets.

You see, somebody who pays EC\$3,000 for an illegal gun will not come and just give you that. In fact, in some countries, in New York in particular, I know recently, they

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have resorted to what you call a “Buyback”. Buyback means you pay money for it. I’m going to buy it back from you to put you back in that position. Now, can we do that, or should we do that? I don’t know. You see, nobody should sit in this room tonight and believe they have that solution to the problem, because many have tried, so let’s not get a little arrogant about it. Many have tried all kinds of propositions, and they didn’t work. We are working together, you ask us to work together, let us work together.

I do not believe that this alone, and I’m not suggesting you said that this alone will work. I’m giving my view that there are some underlying issues that need to be addressed. The first question is, why do young people, why are they so fascinated by guns? As the Member for St. David said, what is this developing culture that we are talking about? We recall post 1979, post 83, Grenada had all the guns, but we didn’t have this problem, did we? In fact, the guns from 1979 to 1983 ended up being sold to other countries, Barbados, and Trinidad, by the persons who owned them, because we never had guns as part of our criminal endeavour. You know, the funny thing is, the cutlass is what we’re known for, what you call the “machete” in some countries.

You know I used to speak to law enforcement all the time and ask this question, why, I said this before and I am sure you’ve heard me say this before, why does Grenada, and I am talking now as if I am speaking five years ago as the Member said, there is a recent proliferation. Why did Grenada and we need to understand that? Why did Grenada, sitting in the middle of St. Vincent, Trinidad and St. Lucia, not have the kind of gun crime that they have? And we need to really ask the question and seek an answer because therein may lie the answer to our problem. Why is it that we who had guns in the Revolution... We use guns in politics... Why weren’t our young people using it for crimes? Let us ask the question. I don’t have the answer, but there’s something to think about there. Why is it only recently, in the last two or three years, that the Member gave the numbers? Was there a proliferation in two, three, or four years? Is it that there are some people in the background...?

Remember, as was suggested, there are some people making money off of guns, you know. Sometimes we remove that and put the ordinary man on the ground, the man

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who has the gun... Remember, there is a business behind guns. The Member talked about the US, which is a gun industry. Who is behind that? Who are the people who are selling all these guns? Miss Jean or Miss Joan's son in Soubise or Marquis can't be that person. They don't have the capacity to bring these guns into this country. So we need to look there too.

I was told by a young man who put me sit down once about four years ago to tell me the number of guns he is seeing shipped from Grenada to St. Vincent that was about seven years ago and that it was some business persons who were bringing them here and shipping them there because there wasn't a market here for it.

So Member for St. David, I think, and again I'm just making a contribution where I believe, because I've been around it, what we need to do. We need to look at the source of all these guns. The port needs to be strengthened, and I'm sure that will be something we are going to be looking at because the guns come into the country. Two or three men bringing in some pounds of weed can't bring in all these guns. Most of the men involved in these things don't have the money to start with. I know that I represent many of them who don't have a lot of money. So there is somebody sitting behind the scenes somewhere pulling these strings, making a huge amount of money. It's like the drug industry, you see the little man selling the two little joints, and so on, that's not the people behind it. There is somebody behind it.

So, let us figure out why it is that Grenada has and continues to have the lowest rate, but we will lose that privilege if we don't do anything. And maybe it is a question of the consciousness of young people, maybe if there was a much higher level of political consciousness, maybe there's a much higher cultural level before. We need to look at that. Was it that there was a consciousness among young people that they were more positive things? You know, I remember back in the day there were certain things, but we can't go back in the day, we have to deal with what we have now. So there was that, then that kept the rate of gun violence down, but there is something that is permeating our society. It is my review that is what we need to address.

What is it we need to do with our young people? I tell you, for example, we had a

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meeting, you would have seen it in the news some time ago, there was some turf war going on, and we met with some of the people who are involved, and we spoke to them to find out what the issue is. Now, of course, yes, the Prime Minister did indicate there is a kind of glorification, and I said it in court all the time.

In fact, the police will tell you that I have been actively involved in recovering guns for them because all my clients know that I am involved in guns, and one of the conditions I give them is to bring me the gun, and I represent you for nothing. And I have been able to grant... And I am sure several of the amnesties before us today, I brought them, and the police will tell you that, and my clients know that. They know that I am not a person who will encourage the use of guns. You give me your gun, take it off the street, and we can talk business.

Because that gun, as the sister from St. Andrew North West indicated, that same gun thing came back at me. I used to be around guns in the past, and these guns are dangerous things, my brothers. I see many young people get shot accidentally, and these young people don't know how to use the guns so they might aim at you, and then they shoot a man all across there. So we need to take them off the street for our own safety, also.

So, I am saying, we need to. When I met with the young people, they were saying, "Listen, we need more activities". So, for example, recently we opened the basketball court close to Four Roads, the place everybody knows, famously or infamously, as "Four Foot", so they can go back to playing basketball, which is what we used to do. Back in the day, the young men in Four Roads were excellent basketball players, but they also played and they met with us yesterday and said they want to open a competition to play small goal. The fact that they're saying this and they said this, we need more activities among young people in this country, more focused, positive activities.

Parents are busy. These days both parents work to pay the bills, to pay the mortgage, you need to get both parents out of the house so the children growing up on the TV or worse yet, the gadgets, where it is, mine gone, the little cell phone that's what bringing up these kids these days inordinate amount of violence on these gadgets. So

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we have to address those issues, we have to address those issues.

We must ensure that in our villages, and I'm sure Members on "This Side" will speak to some of the programmes that we had before, we need to get back to them, and we need to work together. We need to work together in all the communities. As the Member for St. David said, this issue of violence and crime is an issue that can affect the pillars of our economy, tourism. Listen, Trinidad doesn't depend on tourism. They have oil, so they don't depend on tourism. Jamaica is a big country, so you can have violence in Kingston while people go up in Mobay and stay. We are a small country. You have violence in Grenada, it is not like you have violence in Grenville and have violence in Town. You have violence in Grenada tourists will not come. And worse yet, if we end up getting a travel advisory. Well, that's the end of that tourism industry for a bit, so we have to work together, because if we get back into office, we need to inherit a good economy. So we have to work with you who are in the office now, so let us do that. And I, you know I, you know my sister here, she's tired of hearing me say it, unless you work together in this country, we need to just keep doing the same thing we do, over and over. If every time I hear somebody on the "Other Side" speaker, they talk about what we didn't do right, then we're stuck right where we are. We have to work together.

So, same on the issue of gun violence. Member, I agree with you 100%. We need to strengthen the Royal Grenada Police Force and the interdiction unit of the Royal Grenada Police Force. They work hard. The police force works extremely hard. We need to strengthen the Intelligence Unit. They need to have more information about what is happening and who is bringing in the guns. That question has to be answered. Who is bringing guns into this country? Where are **(sound of time bell)**, these persons located? Is that an indication of time?

**Mr. Speaker: (Inaudible comment)**

**Hon. Peter David:** I talked that long already, Mr. Speaker? Mercy me?

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**Mr. Speaker:** It's an indication that your time has far gone.

**Hon. Peter David:** I...

**Mr. Speaker:** The clock is up on the wall, 15 minutes to a speaker...

**Hon. Peter David:** All right, I'll just end up in ... Give me a couple of minutes just to wrap...

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, no. You won't be a couple of minutes.

**Hon. Peter David:** Mr. Speaker, we used to get a five-minute warning, you know. But anyway, Mr. Speaker, so I could wrap up?

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, I'll give you moments to wrap up.

**Hon. Peter David:** Moments to wrap up. You'll tell me when I'm finished with those moments. Mr. Speaker, I urge all of us to work together, but to get to the underlying causes. When you go to the doctor, the doctor is not going to take off something on your face if you realise it's something underlying. There is an issue of youth alienation in this country that is leading them down that path. They are seeking security in places where they should not seek it. So, the leaders are people they gravitate towards, who lead them down a particular path.

So, I say yes, I've been involved in it. I have tried with young people. I continue to try every single day to talk to these young people about the crimes. But, unless, and I want to just finish by saying something, the Member said from St. David, the issue of crime is not a partisan issue. It is not what you do and what I do. It is what we do, because unless we get a hold of that problem, we all would head straight over the precipice. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. **(Applause)**

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**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for the Town of St. George. MP for St. George North East.

**Hon. Ron Redhead:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to be brief, but I just want to start off firstly...

**Mr. Speaker:** Just, just hold. Whose light is on? Is it Honourable...

**Hon. Peter David:** Mine, Mr. Speaker. Sorry.

**Hon. Ron Redhead:** Thank you. So I want to start off, Mr. Speaker, by saying that I rise to support the amendment Bill to the Principal Act, as presented by the Honourable Prime Minister. I also look forward to the commencement of the amnesty, in particular when it comes into effect soon.

I also want to deviate a little from the notes I made to commend the Member for the Town of St. George, through you, Mr. Speaker, for his honesty. The reality is that when lawyers represent criminals, generally, they do not see the bigger picture. And one can appreciate in society that this is a deeply rooted concern about violence and guns, particularly among young people and in this instance, among young men, as the Prime Minister highlighted.

And, Mr. Speaker, when we consider the response, this is why we said from day one that the attempt to undermine the credibility of the RGPF is a dangerous thing to do. And therefore, all of us have that responsibility, not just to say it is not a partisan issue, but to ensure that we demonstrate through our actions and our words, that it is not a partisan issue and that wherever we can find genuine support, more support, empower, enhance the RGPF to do its work, and by extension the multifaceted approach that is required. Mr. Speaker, this Administration, upon assuming office in July of 2022, has witnessed some instances of extreme gun violence. And I can think of at least four from the top of my head:

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1. The assassination of Jonathan Richards of Gun Battle;
2. The Carnival fatal shooting at Mount Egmont;
3. The murder of Randy Jones McIntosh of Carriacou; and
4. The assassination of Dexter Chance, one of the biggest drug dealers in the Eastern Caribbean.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to pause here. While we're talking about guns, my question is, and not to any particular individual. How did one of the biggest drug dealers in the Eastern Caribbean come to Grenada and set up a business? This is something that I believe we must highlight as lawmakers, as a loophole. This was dangerous business, and so, in this instance in particular, it was a case where we, through our own system, allowed this to happen, and we then exposed our people to the potential of the crime.

So, while the amnesty will be the first measure introduced by this Administration to target local safety against illegal guns, it is not the only measure. And the main concern, Mr. Speaker, for the illegal guns as outlined by the Prime Minister in Grenada, is those that are coming in, whether by shipment or as guns for hire. People are coming into Grenada and executing people. This is a serious concern. And so, it is important, in terms of the threat as an external problem that we have to deal with.

So the amnesty is expected to target local guns, local illegal guns on the street, Mr. Speaker, and the opportunity is now created to surrender the illegal guns. But it must not be seen as an opportunity to say that because I am not incentivised, I am not studying that, and I need to protect myself, etcetera. What we are saying, Mr. Speaker, in passing this first part to the whole strategy of tackling illegal guns, is that this is a genuine opportunity for you to peacefully surrender.

The Prime Minister just quoted some of the statistics, in terms of getting or obtaining illegal firearms, which means the RGPF is not making any joke as a result of dealing and treating with the matter of illegal guns on the street. So from 2019 to now, we have seen an increase in the confiscation, I hope I said the word right. I'm a little hungry, Mr. Speaker, and my sight is for, so you have to understand and bear with me.

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So, in terms of confiscating illegal guns, the police are making serious strides, but this will go a long way in peacefully encouraging the environment for criminals, or people who just bought illegal guns for their own safety, to bring them in peacefully.

So there will be no financial incentive for the surrendering, Mr. Speaker, because we simply cannot encourage law breakers to cash in on taxpayers' money first and foremost, to their benefit after they illegally obtained this. And we have to talk tough, sometimes we must make the point that if somebody truly loves you and appreciates you, they have to tell you that you're going wrong. You can't try to take the gun and still tap you on the back, because that is going to bring you back to go and say, alright I get away with this one, let me see if I buy a more expensive one, and let me see if I can sell it during the gun amnesty.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, 90 days knowing the brilliance of some of the criminals today, they might see alright, if we have the financial incentive today, day one of 90 days, I bring in two guns, I get x amount of money. They sit back, they watch that. On day five, they bring in another three, and they get x amount of money. And what you see happening is that, because guns and drugs are closely linked, you then empower, in some instances, criminals to do extra activities by utilising a genuine mechanism, and this loophole is created.

So what we do not want to encourage, Mr. Speaker, is a situation in which we say we are tough on guns, illegal guns, but at the same time we are paying criminals to bring in the guns and then they turn around and fry us with our own fat. You have to be strategic, you have to understand that yes, not all may come forward, but the RGPF is being empowered to ensure they go into the communities and villages to get the illegal guns off the street. So, no financial incentives will be provided. Because, Mr. Speaker, the other issue is that taxpayers are in an environment now, and mind you, there were instances when it was worse than it is now.

I'm saying that the difference is that we expect in a modern society, guns will not be or should not be so much glorified and available on the streets in a loose manner and fashion. So Grenadians want a sense of peace, and therefore the first attempt in any

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argument is to first go by stretching out an olive branch. So this is an attempt to institute the amnesty, stretch the Olive Branch for 90 days and see who comes in. As the Prime Minister mentioned and even the Member for the Town of St. George mentioned, sometimes nobody is coming. It is not a case where we are saying this is a means to an end, but it is the beginning, the commencement, rather than us stretching the Olive Branch to help deal and treat with this matter.

So, Mr. Speaker, another area I want to highlight is that, following the 90 days of the amnesty, once it's finished or concluded, there will be a zero tolerance approach by the RGPF towards illegal guns. And the people found with illegal guns will face mandatory prison sentences, with no bail options. Now, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the concern just raised by the Member for the Town of St. George of it being an underlying problem, challenges that, despite that, in treating with the matter, one has to be extremely tough on this issue.

We see the news, we see the statistics, we see the pain that gun violence is causing. We can either be partially tough or we can be fully tough, when we need to be, so that we can crack down or at least get a handle on this once and for all. So this, Mr. Speaker, is not the only measure, but will be accompanied certainly by other amendments, future discussions, I assume, necessary so that as a society we can take a whole of government approach.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to treat with, as I conclude the matter that the region is facing. Again, the Prime Minister has mentioned this. This is not just a Grenada thing. It's a regional and international problem. And if we take, for example, Haiti, if we get to the root cause, Haiti is on an island, maybe covers about 10 to 15% of Hispaniola, the other is the Dominican Republic. When you look at the Dominican Republic versus Haiti, in terms of the quality of life and the environment, they are totally different. The same island.

This sort of separatist type of approach, that has shoved Haiti as a nation of its own into a corner, the work there is minimal pay, they are producing some of the most fancy clothes, Prada, Gucci, etcetera, but for minimal pay. Their conditions are severe

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for them in terms of their standard of living. Powerful people are the ones shipping the guns because Haiti is not manufacturing any guns, just like the problem in the Caribbean. And so, then when you analyse that threat, the question is, how do we approach this? We can either have simple amendments implemented in our own legislations, or forget everybody else, or we take a unified approach in the Caribbean to deal with this matter.

And so, for what it's worth, I want to join with all who have spoken about this to ensure that the fight against illegal guns in the Caribbean is done on the basis of a multi-faceted regional, international approach to be able to curb gun-related crimes in all societies. We are a small, struggling, but proud nation, and therefore the last thing we want to deal with are externalities which we have no interest in promoting, but they're coming to our shores and we have to spend millions to be able to safeguard our people.

Again, the issue of the porous borders is a cause for concern, and it is something that the government is aware of and will be looking at in the future. The question is, which one should we engage in first? And this is why this amnesty is a critical part of the steps that we are about to take, to be able to reduce the question of illegal guns in our Communities and in general, gun violence in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. So, Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I would like to say that I support this Bill 100%, and I look forward to its commencement. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for St. George North East. And I now invite the MP for St. Andrew South East to make her contribution.

**Hon. Emmalin Pierre:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to give my support to this Bill that has been presented to this Honourable House. And I do so, Mr. Speaker, recognising that anything that can take away or help to take away, even if its one illegal firearm, for more streets should be supported. Mr. Speaker, in doing so I also want to make the point that, we remember for many, many years, historically so, this country has been enjoying a status of one of the safest countries in the world. And, Mr. Speaker, that is why I believe every Grenadian is passionate about wanting to protect

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that.

So we ought not to take very lightly the concerns that are expressed by people from all walks of life, as it relates to recent developments in this area. But I want to join, Mr. Speaker, to give tremendous credit to the Royal Grenada Police Force, all of those men and women who, historically, traditionally, day and night, would labour to protect this country, Mr. Speaker. They deserve to be recognised. **(Applause)** Mr. Speaker, other organisations. So, Mr. Speaker, organisations like the Grenada Gun and Rifle Association and others, who have been promoting that, if you're to own a firearm, it must be licensed, and that if you have one, you must be responsible in the way that you use it.

So, Mr. Speaker, a lot of work has been done in the past as it relates to ensuring that we maintain the status of being a safe country in our region. Of course, we must be concerned, not just with the trends that the Honourable Prime Minister and others referred to, but the fact that we are speaking more and more about regional integration, the fact that more and most steps are being taken, Mr. Speaker, I believe one presenter made the point, that obviously that comes with additional risk, additional possibilities of increase in gun violence. And so, Mr. Speaker, anything that can be done, obviously must be done, should be done to protect us now, but also in a proactive way for what possibilities lie ahead of us.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the Bill and what is presented, and when I listen to the presentation by the Honourable Prime Minister, presenter of the Bill, and I must say I, I recognize a shift in posture Mr. Prime Minister, Honourable Member for St. David's, I feel very strongly and I feel far more comfortable with what I heard today, as opposed to some previous statements. Meaning, Mr. Speaker, in leadership we have to accept responsibility, and so it means that whether it's the foremost responsibility of the RGPF or whoever, ultimately the responsibility lies with those who lead.

And so, our forefront approach is always necessary, not just to allay the fears of people, not just to give hope to people, Mr. Speaker, but as it relates to what contribution, what approach are we going to take to address this? Mr. Speaker, I also heard reference to young men, and the fact that, looking at the statistics, it's all young men. And, Mr.

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Speaker, that in itself is a good reminder that we ought not to be reducing any programme where young men are targeted **(applause)** and supported, to be actively positively involved. And so, I make an appeal, Mr. Speaker, at this time that any programme that engages young men, young men on the blocks.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned, I'm very, very, very concerned that you pass through and you are noticing that the numbers are increasing. And I say so from a matter of fact, that previous programmes like the MPower Programme, for example, many of these young men were positively engaged during the day, reducing the possibilities and chances of negative engagements on the block. So I'm appealing that we find some way to increase those opportunities to get our young men even more engaged in a positive way.

Mr. Speaker, the statistics presented earlier, and I was happy to hear. I don't know what the intention of the presenter of the statistics was **(laughter)**, but I always look for the smile, and I always look for what is said right after the presentation. Mr. Speaker, if we're going to imply that because we would have confiscated 30 firearms in 2023, mean that okay we've just started to really have achievements in this area, Mr. Speaker, it would could well be that in 2023 we had a serious increase in guns on this island, which could be also the reason for the increase in confiscation.

As I said, when you look back at the statistics, even when the police would have confiscated four (4), they were working very hard. So I'm confident that the police has always been working very hard, and what we have to do, is to view the statistics from a point of view to determine whether or not there's an increase in the supplies of guns to our island, and that is where we want to address it from. So it means, therefore, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the port of entry.

And I heard it explained before, that it's identified that most of the guns are coming in, on, in our ports. Right? Ports of entry. And so it means that we must now be able to respond to those. So when we view the statistics, not just from the point of **(laughter)** the celebration, but we also want to use the statistics to inform the actions that we are now going to take as a result.

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Mr. Speaker, I heard the little argument as it relates to whether the current strategy, the amnesty versus the recommendation of buybacks and so on, and I wouldn't go there, Mr. Speaker. I've already stated that I support this, whether it's to buy back, whether it's to allow people to responsibly come forward, I support that also. But also we know, and I think the Honourable Prime Minister made the point that there are pros and cons to almost every strategy that you're going to come up with. So there are pros and cons for the current recommendation as well as others.

And, Mr. Speaker, what we want to look at is how we, even as we implement this new measure, seek to collect data that will also inform future action. So as I say this, I'm remembering in Australia, I believe it was, a couple of years ago, about 17,000, 17,000 guns were taken by the government through an amnesty. But it was rather interesting, Mr. Speaker, the statistics that went with that, which now informed administrators that there might be another approach that we need to complement this, so that you would zero in on the real problem.

So, about 45%, Mr. Speaker, of the guns that were collected came from people who said, I no longer need this. I never really needed it anyway, and I've decided to give it up. No criminals, 45%. Then another 15%, Mr. Speaker, may have been people who feel just like a lot of police officers, who feel carrying around this thing is a real big responsibility. So you're not on duty, you own a gun, legally so, but it's a big responsibility to protect the gun, also. So about 15% of these people, 17,000 of them, would have surrendered because of the responsibility that it carried. And, Mr. Speaker, only 1% would have surrendered because of the fear of being arrested and charged for holding an illegal firearm.

Mr. Speaker, one can look at this statistics and say well, only one percent (1%) of the criminals would have responded positively, but I subscribe to the to the view that was presented earlier, that says any gun in the hands of anybody who is not a law enforcement officer, and even a law enforcement offer could become a risk to somebody else and somebody else can access it as we've seen even with police officers right here in Grenada, accessing a gun that belong to a police officer.

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And so, I'm making the point to say that whether it's the criminal who brings it in, whoever brings it in, may not need it anymore. I believe it is still a plus. But of course, we know the intent and what we trying to achieve here, and of course, we would trust and continue to pray that the people who are **(laughter)** probably the targets in this particular piece of legislation, that they would respond accordingly.

But, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I totally support this, and I believe that, and I hope that it achieved the objectives stated earlier. Mr. Speaker, I want to strongly recommend that there are a number of things that we need to aggressively move on. Mr. Speaker, speedily move on to complement this action. And I just want to state a few things I feel very strongly about, and if they are being considered, I say let us move ahead swiftly. If they are not being considered, and it seems like they make sense to somebody, I would say let us push ahead.

And I want to make the point as well, that "This Side" has always said on this subject, we too do not believe that there is colour. There is no colour. If we point out issues that we think must be addressed, that's not being political about this. And so, we are saying and we've said before, publicly too, that we are prepared to be a part of any initiative or to support any initiative that would reduce gun violence in our country. And, Mr. Speaker, I feel very strongly about this.

There are a number of police officers who have taken early retirement in the last year. I believe that to support the Royal Grenada Police Force at this time, to support the percentage of young recruits that we have within the police force, I believe some form of incentive could be provided to re-engage some of these officers if they wish to do so. Mr. Speaker, I believe this is going to seriously support the existing cadre of officers who are left and available to respond to this particular situation. We've done it in the public service in general, this Government is doing it, in terms of people who are retired and may have a contribution to make in a serious area that they could be considered to offer support, especially, I'm speaking here of people with specialised skills.

Mr. Speaker, the second thing I want to suggest very strongly is that anything that can be done to increase morale within the Royal Grenada Police Force should be done.

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Mr. Speaker, let us not underestimate this. And I'm not going to go into details on this, just to say, any organisation, much less any serious organisation, efforts must always be made to ensure, especially in a crisis situation, that people remain motivated. Whatever the limitations are as it relates to equipment, again, I believe that is another area that can be improved on. Whatever can be done, as I said, measures can be taken to complement and support what is being done here today.

Mr. Speaker, the recertification, as it relates to the training of police officers, not just to learn how to drive, but also the use of firearms. So when we see the developments, Mr. Speaker, we have to ask ourselves, can anything be done additionally to what has been done, to better prepare police officers as it relates to the use of fire arms, because the criminals, they're training too and we want also make sure that there's increased readiness.

But, Mr. Speaker, one that I feel very strongly about, like the others, but probably even more, the multi-sectoral approach. Mr. Speaker, I think this is seriously lacking, and I really want to suggest, not just as it relates to intelligence, right? Mr. Speaker, that is also, there's also a need, not just in terms of intelligence but general multi-sectoral involvement in the conversation, in the approach, in the responsibilities, because every sector of our society, Mr. Speaker, has a critical role to play. Every sector, not just the police, not just the government. And so, the more we can bring sectors together, the more we can engage sectors. Mr. Speaker, I believe it's going to be even better, and the results of all of these efforts will be increased.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I would trust, because this was raised quite some time ago (**sound of time bell**), Mr. Speaker, as it relates to scanners, and I'm ending on this. Scanners for barrels and containers, Mr. Speaker, I also very strongly support this, because we've recognised the problem and now the solution to this must come speedily. So, Mr. Speaker, again, I fully support this, and I just believe that we need to also aggressively move with some complementary strategies to ensure we get the fullest results. (**Applause**)

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**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable MP for St. Andrew South East. MP for St. Mark.

**Hon. Dr. Clarice Modeste–Curwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And do not be fearful of the time I will take. **(Laughter)** Do not be fearful of the time. I, too, am hungry and a bit cold here, but I just felt that I needed to identify with the sentiments expressed and with the Bill, as presented. And you know, to compliment those who would have presented before me, because a lot of valuable suggestions and recommendations would have been made. And I look forward to hearing the success of this endeavour, and to hearing what more we can do and to lending these two old hands to the programme, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. **(Applause)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Wow. Honourable MP, that was a summary. Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if that wasn't a cue for me to say, I have nothing further to add **(laughter)**, nothing else, other than to thank Members for their contribution to the debate, Mr. Speaker. **(Laughter)** So, Mr. Speaker, **(laughter)**, I therefore beg to move, Mr. Speaker, the second reading of the Bill.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Bill read a second time.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Mr.

**Mr. Speaker:** Prime Minister.

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**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House resolves itself into a full Committee of the whole House.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**House in Committee.**

**House resumes.**

**Mr. Speaker:** This Honourable House now resumes. I have to report that the Bill was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment. Honourable Prime Minister.

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

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Chairman's Report adopted.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just realised that I tried to short-circuit the entire Committee process by asking for the third reading of the Bill.

**Mr. Speaker: (Laughter)** It's okay.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** In light of the signal that people were hungry. I now move the third reading of the Bill, Mr. Speaker.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Bill read a third time and passed.**

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**Bills: Electronic Communications Bill, 2024**  
**Adjournment**

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to introduce for the first reading a Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, the Electronic Communications Bill, 2024.

**Clerk:** A Bill which seeks to reform the law relating to telecommunications in the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL), shortly entitled, Electronic Communications Bill, 2024.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** Well, before I move the adjournment, Mr. Speaker, I just want to, I think for the purposes of the House and for Members to just give an update in relation to the fire...

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, please.

**Hon. Dickon Mitchell:** ... in St. Patrick West. In Chantimelle, it is quite a... Well, first, I should say, thankfully, there's no loss of life or limb, but it is a devastating fire in that preliminary indications are that 17 people have been made homeless as a result of the fire. And that we are looking at, as many as five homes have been impacted. So obviously our thoughts are with the families. The Ministry of Social and Community

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Development are mobilising the Royal Grenada Police Force, the Fire Service and all of the utilities and so on, are on the scene.

But there's something that's already a little disturbing coming out of the report, Mr. Speaker, and it's something I've noticed. And I'm saying this, and I want to put the caveat, I don't know what the cause of the fire was, so I can't speak to the cause of the fire. But there is certainly a pattern that I've seen, including in my constituency, where many times the fires are started by children who are left unsupervised and with access to matches. Right?

And the preliminary report is saying that it is likely the fire started in the first home, and that the children aged three and four were at home. And obviously, it's the first day of the Easter break, and so I really wanted to take the opportunity to plead with parents to make sure that, bearing in mind that it's the Easter break, there is some level of supervision of our particular young children. And that if absolutely there is no one to supervise them, we really make every effort to make sure that we do not have within their reach things that can create fires or start fires.

Because obviously, in this case, thankfully, no one was injured, but it could have been a lot worse if these young kids were in the house and were not able to attend. So again, our thoughts and sympathy go out to the victims of the fire. Obviously, I'm sure we would do everything we can to try and provide support for them, in terms of getting them housing and all of the things that go with a fire. And from the images that are circulating on social media, it does appear that all their homes were burnt to the ground, and it's unlikely that much, if anything, was saved. The homes were so close-knit, and they were on one street called Pig Street. It's the name of the street in Chantimelle, St. Patrick.

I just thought I should at least inform Members of the House of the occurrence, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. So, Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I move a Motion for the adjournment of the House, *sine die*.

**Question put and agreed to.**

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***Adjournment***

**The Sitting of the House of Representatives adjourned sine die at 2:22 p.m.**

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