GRENADA

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(HANSARD)

THIRD SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT

SEANTE

TUESDAY 18TH & THURSDAY 20TH MARCH, 2025

(BUDGET DEBATE)

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Senate Budget Debate, 2025
held at the Parliament Chamber, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's
on Tuesday 18th and Thursday 20th, March 2025

Attendance

PRESENT

Madam President
Senator the Honourable Dr. Dessima Williams
in the Chair

Senator the Honourable Adrian Thomas	-	Minister for Tourism, Creative Economy and Culture
Senator the Honourable David Evlyn Andrew	-	Minister for Education
Senator the Honourable Quinc Britton	-	Parliamentary Secretary within the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Economy and Culture with Responsibility for Culture
Senator the Honourable Seville Francis	-	Parliamentary Secretary within the Ministry of Youth and Sports
Senator the Honourable Claudette Joseph	-	Attorney General and Minister for Legal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Affairs
Senator the Honourable Gloria Ann Thomas	-	Minister for Social & Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs (Social Security)
Senator the Honourable Norland Cox	-	Opposition Member of the Senate (Deputy President)
Senator the Honourable Dr. Myanna Charles	-	Opposition Member of the Senate
Senator the Honourable Salim Rahaman	-	Member of the Senate (Business Rep.)
Senator the Honourable Roderick St. Clair	-	Member of the Senate (Farmers Rep.)

Attendance

ABSENT

Senator the Honourable Dwight Hosford	-	Opposition Member of the Senate (*Excuse tendered)*
Senator the Honourable Mondy André Lewis	-	Member of the Senate (Labour Rep.) (*Excuse tendered*)

Prayers
Minutes

The Sitting of the Senate began at 9:10 a.m.

(Senate Prayer was said)

Madam President: Honourable Members, please join in saying the Lord's Prayer.

(The Lord's Prayer was said)

Madam President: Pray be seated.

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

Madam President: Good morning, colleagues. Leader of Government's Business, Senator Adrian Thomas, you have the floor, sir.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Good morning, Madam President, Clerk of Parliament and your staff. Good morning to all visitors. Madam President, I beg that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Sitting of the Senate, held at the Parliament Building. Mt. Wheldale, St. George's, on Tuesday the 4th of February, 2025, be taken as read.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator.

Question put and agreed to.
Minutes taken as read.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Minutes
Announcements

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Sitting of the Senate held at the Parliament Building, Mt. Wheldale, St. George's, on Tuesday the 4th of February, 2025, be confirmed.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator.

Question put and agreed to.
Minutes confirmed.

Deputy Clerk: Item 5 – Messages from the Governor-General.
Item 6 – Announcements by Madam President.

Madam President: Thank you, Deputy Clerk. Distinguished Senators, welcome back. Welcome back to your home. I have been advised that the following Senators are unavoidably absent: Senator André Lewis, Senator Dwight Horsford, and there is some uncertainty, but Senator Claudette Joseph may not be in attendance. That's correct? **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Also unavoidably absent…

Let us begin then by welcoming all of the participants in this Budget Debate on the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditure for 2025, and on behalf of the Senate, I extend the special—here comes Senator Claudette Joseph. Not unavoidably absent. Very much present. Welcome, Senator. We welcome all of you who are in the House, in the Chamber and others who are online to our 2025 Senate Debate, the start of it.

Honourable Members, I understand that former Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Doctor Keith Mitchell, fell ill at a public event last night, but that he's now recovering. On behalf of the Senate, I wish Doctor Mitchell the best of health.

Honourable Senators, when we last met on February 4, we were in preparation mode for the celebration of Grenada's 51st Anniversary of Independence. Again, on behalf of the Senate, I wish to thank the organiser, the National Celebrations Committee, and to thank the people of Grenada, led by Her Excellency, Dame Cécile La Grenade

and the Prime Minister of Grenada, Dickon Mitchell, for their leadership and for their positive support of our national independence, and continue to congratulate the people of Grenada.

We also have celebrated International Women's Day on the 8th of this month, a few days earlier, and we understand that the Ministry of Social Development, Gender Affairs will be having some year-long celebrations. We wish to thank and congratulate the ministry, and we wish to extend warm and continuing congratulations to all the girls, women, and men who support us for International Women's Day.

Lastly, I would like to report that four committees of the Senate… This is quite important for us for our work. Four committees of the Senate, duly constituted according to our Standing Orders, have met since our last sitting. These four committees are:

- The Senate House Committee;
- The Standing Orders Committee;
- The Selection Committee; and
- The Senate Privileges Committee.

I wish to thank all the Senators who serve on them, despite your busy schedule, and I wish to say that I think the main takeaway we've had from these four meetings is that we need them. We need them to function so that the Senate can function in its fullness, so we will continue to meet as often as we need. Dormancy of these mandatory bodies has meant that the Senate is not doing all that it is called upon to do. All members and I were glad to get them going again, and we left the meetings with a work plan, some more articulated than others. So again, thank you, Members, for attending and thank you to the administration under the leadership of the Clerk for the start-up of these committees at the beginning of the year. These are all my announcements for now, and I thank you for your patience.

Deputy Clerk: Item 7 – Ministerial Statements.

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

Presentation of Papers / Reports

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business, you have the floor, sir.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I rise to present the following Papers and Reports from Selected Committees. Madam President, I have six Papers and Reports that I need to present here.

1. Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025;
2. Medium Term Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 2025 – 2027;
3. Medium Term Debt Management Strategy 2025-2027;
4. Annual Debt Report 2023;
5. Report on use of CCRIF Payout;
6. NOC Report - 50th Independence Anniversary Celebrations;
7. Report on Contingency Fund 2024.

So in all, we have seven Reports. Thank you.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Thomas. Honourable Members, the seven Reports are laid before this House. Any contributions? Hearing none… There is Senator, the Honourable Roderick St. Clair. Good morning, welcome, and the microphone is yours, sir.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: Thank you, Madam President. I pressed the left button, which is why it didn't go on the first time. I want to say good morning to you and your staff. Good morning to all the fellow Senators in the Chamber and, of course, all the visitors and those listening and following this important activity here today.

Madam President, we also thank you very much for giving us these opportunities to speak on those reports because those reports are public documents, and it is really helpful to read and see what is going on in there.

And so, my review of this Fiscal Mid-Term Report, as presented as of December 31 2024, I have a few comments that I want to share with this opportunity. So, of course, having represented the farmers and fisherfolk and how they're intertwined in other

sectors, I wish to speak.

So, first, Madam President, on page eight, it was very instructive to look at what has been happening with the agriculture sector as reported in this document. It provides a sort of focus, outlook, or groundwork for persons in the sector and others. So, for example, we see there that the cocoa and nutmeg industries shows a drop of 30% compared to the previous period, and of course, the reports attributed some of this to some key factors and challenges that the sector do have the speak of labour, that's a big issue, roads, another big issue, cost of inputs and so on.

It also spoke about the impact of Beryl and, of course, the support provided by the Government in the form of the income support in some EC$32 million that was provided for farmers and fisherfolk. At the same time, it highlighted that the intervention, much needed, for spice replanting, 150 acres of nutmeg and other spices, for which we'll be grateful. This project is so slow in rolling out, but it's very important so that we can recover where we need to be.

It also shows… And this is something we have noticed even after Hurricane Ivan, notwithstanding damages to boats and efficient infrastructure, generally, the fish are available in the sea. And so, while there was some reduction in fish exports, it was not significant. They spoke about 1% or 2% versus what we have seen in the other parts of the crop, for example.

What was important too, Madam President, and this is coming up again, and I think that as a nation and as a Government, we need to look at this matter. It's not a new matter, but the whole issue of having a proper dataset, particularly for the crop component and the livestock component. The cocoa and nutmeg are a little bit easier because they are associations kept in those data, so you are dealing with a lot of estimation and so on. I think we need to move beyond that, particularly if we want to speak about our food security and securing our whole best basket. So this… There must be some concerted effort somewhere to deal specifically with how we collect this data. I'm not even speaking about real-time data, but at least collecting it in our manner, whereby we can know what is happening with our food production and livestock production.

The other area I wish to also speak about, linked to that, Madam President, is the history of tourism. We are seeing some good increases in our visitors, 14% plus. We need that because we need to be able to feed these people. But what was highlighted in the report is the need for improving our whole attraction sites, such that the tourist dollar, which has moved from $50 to $76 that they would pay, that they will spend when they come; if we have more and better attractions, it can go to maybe $100. So, just by not increasing the number of persons coming in, we can get more value. So I thought that was a very important point, and being involved in the Nutmeg Association, and having that tourism linkage, particularly, as it relates to having museums one in Victoria, one in Beaulieu, Spice Garden and connecting and working very closely with the Board of Tourism to look at some other initiatives, I use this opportunity here to call on all those involved in that sector to increase our offering in terms of quality and quantity as it may go there.

The report speaks about the issue of tourism, including the issue of increasing flights and so on, but at the same time, particularly in Canada and so on. We do have a lot of challenges for air lift of fish and our agricultural products, fresh produce, and so we need to find a better mix in the way we negotiate some of these offerings so that they are not one-sided. Of course, you could say, while they come in here, and so they will eat fish here, so we don't have to export the fish, but of course, we know at the end of the day, this influences the whole issue of our balance of trade and so on. In fact, we see that there is a small improvement to the balance of trade, not much, you know, maybe just about EC$2 million, but at least it means that something has happened right in that process.

So another important area I also kept here, in this, Madam President, is the issue of finance because you know agriculture is an area… Everybody… Nobody wants to… Agriculture is risky. They will steal your stuff… Hurricane would pass… But what we saw, for what it's worth, we saw some small improvement, just about EC$15 million more being pumped from the banking sector into agriculture and fishing industries, which is not bad. It shows that there is some confidence there, and so we need to see what has

happened and what lessons have been learnt, such that we can have more money going into agriculture and fishing.

At the same time though, very insightful is that there was a call in report for the GDB, which originally was called the Agriculture Bank to help the agricultural sector and it says specifically on one of those pages, I think it was page 27, towards the end of one of the paragraphs, it speaks about GDB to really do what they're supposed to do to help more in the mobilisation and collaboration of resources to help the agriculture sector. So I know Brother Cumberbatch, he's the man who tried to speak, and he really meant a lot. I trust that he can get the board to work with him and really make that mandate of the law, for which they operate, a reality, and so that's a clarion call, and it's good that the report was able to capture that, which means that there is some level of, I will say, fairness in the report.

The last part I want to speak on, Madam President, is the whole issue of the budget risk. There were a lot of different risks that were mentioned; climate change, et cetera, but there are some key risks that I thought needed to be pulled out. So, for example, they spoke about the risk of financing the budget, so if there is any shortfall, and they were good indicators showing… You know, using the orange and red template, I think page 47 would help you with that.

It shows if this happened, what should happen. So, for example, we know that a significant part of our budget is financed from the National Transformation Fund, which is linked to what is referred to as the Citizen by Investment Programme. We know that there have been calls to tighten a lot of measures, and that is drastically impacting our income and revenue to finance a lot of activities of the Government, for which we as citizens are beneficiaries.

In that regard, it spoke about the Amigos Act that the US introduced, so that before, when you could have come and get a passport and get a visa to the US very easily, maybe within a year, now you have to literally have residents about three years in the country so that now is becoming unattractive and of course, that would impact. So that's one risk, and it's something that we have to be mindful about, bearing in mind the, I don't

want to use the word turmoil, but the heightened activities in the north of us, in terms of all different restrictions.

Of course, in that same regard, we have seen what has happened to a lot of the US aid and US support that the Government or other agencies in Grenada have been receiving, so that would cut down on a lot of projects. Some projects have even stopped, you know, a serious project that involves, you know, benefiting young women and the disadvantaged.

Of course, what was interesting for me in that whole risk issue, Madam President, the issue of the implementation capacity, and what came out clearly is, notwithstanding the hiring of different personnel and MIT involvement… What came out clearly, and from my own experience, is that there is a need for more coordination among the ministries. They need to have some more seamless lines for a lot of these projects to be implemented, such that, the money doesn't remain sitting there and spinning, and doing nothing because when monies are drawn down or located, especially loans and so on, interest is running on them while we're not using them and that is a cost, and maybe we don't understand that, and maybe that is one of the matrix that need to be measured and see how best the ministries can better perform those rules. So that to me is what stands out, notwithstanding the issue of getting more people and training and so on, because that has been said in timely memorial; that brings another recommendation that I want to add to that.

I think that the issue of monitoring and evaluating is very important, not waiting for when the World Bank come or when the IDA comes, but internally, if it's every month, there must be a "where are we with this activity that we're supposed to be working on", not when someone raise an issue then all of a sudden everybody raise up and say, "No, well, the report is still in its third quarter, you know, and we are just in June so no problem", but it's costing us money as a country, and we need to maybe look and see what is the cost of interest incurred during this time of down time by "playing the fool".

And of course, this is… The last point I want to raise, which the government also looked at in the report, is the whole issue of different contingent liabilities and so on, that

is, maybe debt that the Government can be exposed to and so on. And of course, the one I flagged… They mentioned two; one was mentioned as not a big issue; it's just some partnership with Digicel involving our telecom infrastructure.

The one that seems to be of concern is the Grenville Project of EC$18 million, where no activity has really been taking place. I mean, I live in the community, and I've been hearing about this project that is supposed to happen, and nothing is happening. EC$18 million? Was this money drawn down four to five years ago, racking up interest, and nothing is happening? So I think these are some of the concerns that I wish to share with our people because this interest that…

Madam President: Senator St Clair.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: … we have to pay, can be used for other purposes…

Madam President: What is the name of the project you referred to?

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: Pardon me?

Madam President: What is the name of this project?

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: It's called the Grenville Commercial Complex. It's somewhere around 47, 48 in that 7(2) section. There are two contingent, and Grenville… It has to do with what was referred to as the old Post Office in Grenville, and setting up a commercial unit, and so on. It's good. I think, but...

Madam President: All right.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: … the delay. Why is there a delay? What is

happening? Was money drawn down? The interest is being… and whilst that is going on, within the farming community, we have a lot of challenges. For example, they spoke about one of the main areas that shows great improvement in manufacturing is animal feed; but of course, we know that as far as the increasing production, the more we buy, the cost of it is so high, it's increasing our whole cost of food. So, can we use somebody's money to help reduce the cost of a feed for our farmers, because the legislative agenda seems to be almost in a minus in that regard?

So these are things that would maybe elaborate more on in the budget, but these are some of the key things I think are touching and pertaining to the sector to which I'm connected. Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: I thank you, Senator St. Clair, for your panoramic review. Your first point is of particular interest to you, I'm sure, the question of reduction of fisheries production and… **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Yes, reduction of production as a whole, but I would note that you would have noted also that there is additional funds being put into that according to the report, so let's see if it's a matter of correcting a time lag and nothing more. Thank you. Other comments on these reports that are laid before the Senate? Hearing none, I wish to say to you, Honourable Members of the Senate, that these six afro-named Papers and Reports are laid before you.

Deputy Clerk: Item 9 – Petitions.
Item 10 – Government Notices.
Item 11 – Unofficial Notices.
Item 12 – Questions.
Item 13 – Personal Explanations.
Item 14 – Motions.

Madam President: I offer the floor to the Leader of Government's Business in the Senate, Honourable Senator Adrian Thomas.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Adrian Thomas

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I rise to move the Motion.

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

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the said Address be accepted since the debate today will deliberate on the said subject matter.

Madam President: Thank you. Senator Thomas.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion approved.

Madam President: Honourable Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you, Madam President.

WHEREAS it is necessary to provide for the services of the State of Grenada for the Year 2025 by means of an Appropriation Act;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Fiscal Year 1st January, 2025 to 31st December, 2025 be approved.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator.

Question proposed.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, Honourable Members of the Senate on both sides, the Clerk of Parliament and staff, fellow citizens of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, home and broad, those of you who has graced us with your presence here today, in person, in

particular, the students we are very happy to have you, and if only, I was somewhere in the "Other Place" I would have asked the President to give me permission to request of you a round of applause, but I asked my colleagues in the Senate to do that **(applause)**, those of you at home in your living rooms, on your beds or wherever the television may have been placed, all those online social media viewers, pleasant day to all.

Madam President, before I start this presentation, I would like to endorse your empathy with the former Prime Minister, Doctor the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell, with the incident that happened last night. I want to endorse your statement, and also want to endorse the statement of the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Dickon Mitchell. We all empathise with him and we wish him a full recovery as soon as possible.

Madam President, it is both an honour and a privilege to stand before you today to present the Budget for the fiscal year 2025. As we embark on a new financial year, we do so with a profound sense of responsibility, knowing that the economic decisions we make today will shape the future of our nation, strengthen our resilience and uplift the lives of our people.

Madam President, before I go further, please permit me to express my gratitude to Almighty God for his grace and mercy. I would also like to thank the Prime Minister, Honourable Dickon Mitchell, for his continued confidence in me as a Leader of Government's Business in the Senate. My Cabinet colleagues, to you, the President of the Senate, Clerk and other parliamentary staff, Senators on both sides of the House, I'm very grateful for being able to work together with you for the past year, and it will be remiss of me if I didn't say special heart thank you to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, the Creative Economy and Culture, and today entire staff including statutory bodies for the sincere and unwavering support they have shown to me for the entire year 2024.

Madam President, we configured and operationalised this brand new ministry at the beginning of 2024. Our plan is to transform the tourism industry in this country, and this plan, Madam President, is very realistic, developmental and meaningful to this

country. So, Madam President, I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to all the stakeholders who are involved in this very important industry.

I also want to recognise the Board of Directors and staff of the following statutory bodies: the Grenada Tourism Authority, Spicemas Corporation, Grenada National Museum, The Cultural Foundation, Grenada National Trust, and all those stakeholders who have worked with us throughout the year. I say a sincere thank you to all.

Madam President, the 2025 Budget is crafted with a commitment to sustainable growth, economic diversification and inclusive development. Our aim is to foster economic stability while ensuring that every Grenadian benefits from the fruits of the progress. May the good Lord bless our progress with the Congress. **(Applause)**

In preparing this budget, Madam President, we have taken into careful consideration the global economic climate. Very important. We have also looked at the regional trends and our national priorities as we seek to build a stronger, more self-reliant economy.

Madam President, 2024 has been a year of significant challenges. Notably, our uninvited guest was Hurricane Beryl. On July 1, Hurricane Beryl inflicted significant damage to homes, roads, bridges, utilities, businesses, agriculture, marine sectors, et cetera, et cetera. Our assessment, Madam President, indicated that the damage amounted to roughly EC$630 million, which left Carriacou, Petite Martinique and the northern parishes of our mainland, St. Patrick, part of St. Andrew and St. Mark, devastated.

Madam President, just a few weeks later, unprecedented rains caused major flooding and landslides in our country. Many people thought that was the end of Grenada, but, Madam President, this Government was not daunted. We led from the front.

The Prime Minister, as the commander in chief, took charge long before and after the arrival of Hurricane Beryl. It was service for the people in times of need. According to the good book, Madam President, Mark 10, verse 43 to 45, "[43]Whoever wants to become great among you must be a servant, [44]and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. [45]For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give

his life as a ransom for men". Madam President, it is all about putting people first, and this is exactly what this Government led by the Honourable Dickon Mitchell did in times of need. **(Applause)**

Madam President, we also had some great achievements. We've witnessed the resilience of our people and the determination of our Government to advance policies and promote economic stability, social equity and environmental sustainability. The global economy, Madam President, has faced uncertainties due to fluctuating commodity prices, inflationary pressures, and climate-related disruptions, but through prudence and physical management, Grenada has remained on the steady path of economic growth and recovery.

This year's Budget is built on key principles such as economic resilience, social transformation and fiscal responsibility. Through these guiding principles, we seek to create opportunities for investment, job creation and social empowerment, while maintaining some fiscal discipline. Madam President, economic resilience is at the heart of our strategic vision. As a small island development state, sometimes I like to refer to our islands as "big ocean state", we continue to face vulnerabilities related to external shocks, including climate change and global financial fluctuation.

Madam President, to counter these risks, this budget will prioritise investments in agriculture, tourism, digital transformation and renewable energy, ensuring that we build a diversified economy that will withstand future uncertainties. Equally important, Madam President, is our commitment to social transformation. The prosperity of Grenada cannot be measured solely in economic terms; it must be reflected in the well-being of our citizens, Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)**

Our Government is deeply committed to enhancing healthcare, strengthening education and ensuring that our most vulnerable citizens are well supported. The 2025 Budget will introduce new initiatives, including youth empowerment, skills development, and community resilience, recognising that a nation's greatest assets are its people. Madam President, fiscal responsibility remains an unwavering priority.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Adrian Thomas

Our Administration is dedicated to maintaining sound financial management, reducing national debt, and ensuring that public resources are allocated effectively and efficiently. Madam President, by strengthening government frameworks, enhancing revenue collection and promoting public-private partnerships, we will continue to build a robust economic foundation for future generations.

This budget is not just a financial document, Madam President, it is a blueprint for progress and prosperity. Madam President, it reflects our shared aspiration as a nation, our collective determination to overcome challenges, and our unwavering commitment to secure a better future for all. As we move forward, it is imperative that we work together, government, the private sector, and all citizens alike to build a Grenada that is economically strong, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. With these guiding principles, I now present to you, Madam President, and this Honourable House, the details of the 2025 Budget outlining the policies and initiatives that will drive our nation's continued development.

Madam President, our Prime Minister declared in his Independence Address, on February 7, 2025, and I quote, "We are a great nation. There is greatness in every one of us". **(Applause)** I repeat. "We are a great nation, and there is greatness in every one of us."

Madam President, this is a very powerful and inspiring statement. It reinforces national pride and unity while recognising the potential within every citizen. How do we utilise that greatness? How does the Government encourage citizens and get them to capitalise on that greatness? This Budget, Madam President, is geared to create the enabling environment to do just that. We have the responsibility, and we have the potential, and the prime minister has recognised that.

If you were to itemise some of the greatness and what it has done for our country, I am sure both sides of the House will knock the table when I say, Kirani James. **(Applause)** When I say Earl Brathwaite. **(Applause)** When I say Blaka Dan. **(Applause)** When I say James Clarkson. **(Applause)** When I say Huggins **(applause)**, Ramdhanny, and Hopkin. **(Applause)** When I say farmers and fisherfolk. **(Applause)** … When I

say Maurice Bishop. **(Applause)** And, Madam President, I know everyone will not knock now, when I say Dickon Amiss Thomas Mitchell. **(Applause)**

Madam President, this is the greatness we are talking about, and greatness individually can be capitalised on for your own individual advancement and development, and if every individual were to utilise their greatness, what a great community we will have, and if we have great communities, Madam President, we will have great parishes and even a greater country. **(Applause)** If you are a great country in the world by utilising your goodness, Madam President, what a great world it will be for each and every one of us to live peacefully.

Madam President, I would like to give some updates, key reforms and policies of this great country. Madam President, only yesterday we got a current update on the hydrocarbon potential of Grenada and where we're going with it. Madam President, there is a potential. We are exploring it, and we are continuing. We started working on it in 2023, and we will continue. The prospects look good.

I want to use this opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude to the technical working group. They have provided a clear road map in terms of where we are going with the hydrocarbon, and this is great news. The Government will provide public and comprehensive updates as we go along to the people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)**

Another key reform programme that is on the way, Madam President, we as a Government have taken the responsibility to resolve the Kawana Bay dispute that has been held up for quite a while. This Government has resolved this matter, and we are not talking to new developers. Madam President, in weeks and months to come, this project will recommence as we move to develop the tourism industry. **(Applause)**

Madam President, I must mention the presence of Six Senses today, and also the expansion of the Beach House—Silver Sands Project in Grenada. This project, Madam President, means a lot to us, and we, as a Government, will do everything to make sure that we move forward with it.

Madam President, the issue of Marketing and National Importing Board decisive

steps, Madam President, are being taken to address this issue. We have scaled down the operation of this very important institution, and our intention is to make sure that we have an institution that can not only provide key services to farmers in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, but also, Madam President, to make sure that the consumers get quality service. This project is on its way. The Government has taken up all the debts that came with this project, and we are starting on a fresh slate.

Madam President, we are looking. Presently, we are holding talks with a strategic partner because we do not want to make it a Government project again, but we want to make it a public-private partnership, and we believe… A new company, which we'll call Import-Export Agromart Limited. This is the direction. We are working with the Ministry of Legal Affairs to make sure that all illegal documents are being taken care of. This is an update, in terms of one of the reform projects that we have taken on, Madam President.

Madam President, this Administration, we have strengthened parliamentary representation, and we continue to strengthen the parliamentary representation. Madam President, salaries have already been paid to MPs. For the first time in Grenada… For the very first time, Parliamentarians have received something of substance. **(Applause)** I will make sure to qualify my statement, Senator Cox.

It's not the first time they have received a stipend, but today, Parliamentarians can raise their hands and say, "Yes, I'm being paid for the work I came here to do". **(Applause)** I don't know if I should call the figures, but I think people are quite, for now, getting an increase of 434%, we are shown respect for this Honourable House. This Government has shown respect for and the importance of having this Honourable House.

We cannot sit here and guide our society by legislative laws. We have the potential to make this society and shape it into whatever form we want, and we must take care of our… **(Laughter)** My colleagues are telling me to say it. Well, I mean, we used to get about EC$800? Only that, right? Well, I am looking for the correction and the "Other Side" to say that, "You guys never used to get anything. You all were in Government, and we used to get about EC$800", but today, we have advanced, and the people in the Lower House collected EC$1200 on the "Opposition Side". Today they are collecting

EC$5,000 a month, and I think it's a good salary. **(Applause)**

Madam President, we want to offer… We are exploring the possibility of giving MPs the necessary tools to work in their constituencies. We are exploring the possibility of giving the MPs a home, an office, not for the MP of a particular party, but when your party is in Government, they use the office. When your party is out of Government, you exit, and this will be the constituency office of the people of the various constituencies; that is the direction we want to go in terms of strengthening parliamentary representation in Grenada.

Madam President, in 2025, we are also thinking of making a vehicle available to every MP in the various constituencies. If you want to be an MP and you want to be a politician, you have to go to the people. People will not be able to come to you all the time, and we want to make it as comfortable as possible, so there is no excuse that my vehicle is broken down or I don't have a vehicle, and you are an MP. We want to make this available to the various MPs, Madam President.

Public Sector Reform, Madam President, and the Minister for Finance, when he was present in the "Other Place", made the point that public servants dodged a bullet in July 2022. If they hadn't dodged that bullet, and this Administration hadn't come to office, public sector reform would not have been a reality.

Madam President, the bullet that they dodged was the "pension bullet". Today, public servants who are retired and who are employed after February '85 can now relax at home and be comfortable with peace of mind. Their lives have been converted from retiring into poverty to having a very comfortable life sitting at home. Thank God, Madam President **(applause)**, for the pension that was paid to public workers. I say, may God bless the progress with the Congress. **(Applause)**

That cost the Government over EC$75 million, Madam President, and when we paid that money, lives were not placed on hold, construction didn't stop, education reform didn't stop, and increases in inside salaries didn't stop. But on top of that, while we recognise the difficulties of future administrations 50 years, 60 years from now will have difficulties in maintaining two pensions, this Administration…

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Adrian Thomas

The decisions we are taking are not just for today, because the real effect of this decision on Grenada's New Contributory Pension Plan is to cover over 3600 Government employees. Madam President, and other people are free to come and join us.

Madam President, this plan will make every public servant work comfortably without worrying about what will happen to them after their time. Madam President, this is the plan we welcome, and the public servant, despite the little difficulties we had in taking off, I think people are quite comfortable with it, and they appreciate it, and they are ready, and they are paying and contributing to it quite willingly.

But apart from that, Madam President, those people are not qualified for a pension, and they're still in the service, who are on contract, who are temporary workers for years Government didn't leave them like that. We make it retroactive, and we have allocated EC$11.3 million in benefits that people can take to the contributory pension plan. **(Applause)**

Madam President, the regularisation process has begun. Madam President, we have already completed phase one of this project. This Administration confirmed some 455 officers. You're in a service for five or 10 years, and you do not know every day is your final day at the job, because you do not know what will happen to you the next day, and if you talk too hard to your boss or supervisor, that could be your final day. Today, public servants are quite comfortable having a letter of appointment in their hands. They have a future job, a prominent job that will carry them into the future. **(Applause)**

Madam President, the second phase, which targets approximately 1262 workers, is on its way, and these workers, some of them, are holding PSC contracts, Public Service Commission Contracts, Government of Grenada Contract and Ministerial Letter and some of them are daily paid, as I said, on a daily basis.

Madam President, these workers, we're hoping that by the end of April 2025, we will have a total of 1,179 workers being regularised in the service and we will be investing a sum of EC$22.7 million on the regularisation project, Madam President **(applause)**, and then we have another 3,031 workers, some of them holding contracts and the vast majority of them come from the IMANI Project; a project that gave people some false

assurance that they will have a job for life, a training project, it's supposed to have been turned out to be much more than training.

Madam President, I am proud to stand here and to tell this Honourable House that all these workers by December 2025 will be permanent in the service or in the private sector where they can be placed, Madam President. We want to give our workers some level of assurance that they have a permanent job. We do not want people to believe that they receive an 18-month training programme and then work for EC$700 or more, with a maximum of EC$1200, for 10 years or more. We have moved that since last year to an extra EC$500. The workers are quite happy, and we regularise them and make them permanent workers in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)**

Madam President, another issue I would like to update this Honourable House on is the question of a pay and upgrade adjustment for the Royal Grenada Police Force. Our Government is pleased to announce the resolution of the long-outstanding and painful issue of pay and grade adjustment for the hard-working and dedicated men and women of the Royal Grenada Police Force. **(Applause)**

Madam President, it will cost the state another EC$6.5 million, and I am hesitant to say that the average increase in pay for police constables is estimated at EC$750 per month **(applause)** and when we, in this Administration, make a promise. It is a promise? **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** It's a promise made; a promise kept.

We have laid the foundation to ensure that in a few weeks' time, over 1,000 police members of the Royal Grenada Police Force will be enjoying… As a matter of fact, it will be retroactive because it will start from the 1st of January, and I cannot overemphasise the importance of security in our state, in our country. Without the police force, we cannot enjoy the international fame and glory that Grenada is a safe place, and the people in the Grenada Tourism Authority will tell you how much they ride on that wave. It is our responsibility to maintain and sustain that atmosphere, and the Royal Grenada Police Force has a very important role to play in ensuring that we maintain that.

Madam President, I just want to make a quick point here regarding how we treat with the CCRIF funds that we receive from the effects of Hurricane Beryl, and I will just

go quickly in terms of the spending of that money. Immediate post-event repairs to public buildings and physical infrastructure, Madam President, we spent EC$15.8 million in that area. Repairs to infrastructure for communities that include housing communities, health centres, etc., EC$15.7 million. Purchase of food, water, and medication for individuals, EC$3 million. Risk mitigation activities to reduce vulnerability to future natural hazard events, EC$13.5 million. Payment to persons in support of their livelihoods, talking about farmers and fisherfolk, EC$31.3 million. Beryl Response Income Support Program, EC$14.5 million. Business Reactivation Support, EC$25 million. Madam President, in that short space of time, over EC$180 million went into the economy straight away. We didn't keep that money, stash it away for when an election is coming. We utilised that money because we believe in putting people first. **(Applause)**

Madam President, mind you, I would not stand… It will be remiss of me if I do not give the former Administration some credit for taking the initiative, and I want to make the point very clear so that later on in the day, we will not hear any words of ungratefulness.

Madam President, more to that, we also advanced the initiative because we encouraged NAWASA and GRENLEC to be part of this insurance scheme, and what happened during the hurricane?

GRENLEC received over EC$24 million, and this was vital finance that they needed to help revitalise the infrastructure, especially in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. NAWASA, Madam President, collected almost EC$6 million; this again helped the restoration of water in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique in weeks' time. Madam President, we are very, very grateful for those dollars and cents to be pumped into the economy.

Those are some of the areas, Madam President, I thought maybe I should have highlighted, but I also want to make the point regarding the importance of saving for the rainy days because we have also established with the ECCB, that the Contingency Fund, we're 10% of BNTF, will be saved there for whenever we have disasters of that nature. We are saving some money for rainy days.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Adrian Thomas

Madam President, I just want to turn to the whole question of the Marco Economic and Social context regarding where we are going with this 2025 Budget. Madam President, despite the difficulties we had with Hurricane Beryl, we still expect the economy to grow by 4.5% in 2025, and in 2024, we did realise a 3.5% increase in GDP. That means, Madam President, despite difficulties the economy did well **(applause)**, and if it was not a sound fiscal management, this would not have been a reality, and therefore, I'm blowing our own trumpet here, that this Administration under the leadership of Dickon Mitchell and the Ministry of Finance's team, Madam President, we did damn good. **(Applause)** Respect my language… And we continue to do well. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** That's okay. **(Laughter)** My colleagues on the "Other Side" are nodding and I was able to bring out a smile…

Madam President: The President heard it. The President heard it. Don't worry.

(Laughter)

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, in our country, labour conditions remain very stable. The unemployment rate is recorded at around 12%, and the plans and programmes we have expect the unemployment rate to reduce significantly in 2025 and 2026, as we go forward in 2027. It's only yesterday that one of my colleagues said to me, normally, when he leaves home in the morning, the blocks are heavily populated. These days, he is asking where the young men have gone or where the blocked occupants have gone.

On evenings, once I leave town by 4:00 p.m. or 4:30 p.m., I have to give quite a few people a ride with a little bag on their side, which is an indication that somebody's going somewhere between the hours of 8:00 a.m., and 4:00 p.m., and this is a very good sign in this country, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Employment is picking up. People are being placed in a position where they can help themselves, their families and the communities. I would like to hear the presentation

from the Senator representing the Business Community regarding how well the business community is doing. Some businesses in town, Madam President, for the very first time or in many years, could not have paid back pay or bonus, but they are paying it, so I guess things are looking good, and the economy is booming. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Agreed, Senator Cox?

Madam President, I must make the point that we have the privilege, because of Hurricane Beryl, to suspend the Fiscal Resilience Act last year because of the hurricane, and we still have the responsibility to suspend it, and we will do so. But despite the fact that we can suspend it, we are very prudent in our management of this economy. We will not take advantage. One particular area in which we've managed quite well, Madam President, is the whole question of maintaining and ensuring that salaries and employment remain at 13%. We would not abuse it, and employ people for the sake of employment, to buy votes and all these sorts of things. We are not doing that. We will remain prudent in our actions and inactions, Madam President. The financial sector remains very stable.

Madam President, I now turn to the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. Madam President, before we prepared this budget, this Administration had widespread consultations, and because of the consultations, because we return to the people, we want to place on record our sincere thanks to the citizens of Grenada and all the stakeholders who have contributed significantly in putting this budget together. It was not just Cabinet ideas or our friend's ideas. It was the community. It was the country, the population, and not only those in Grenada, but those in the diaspora as well, Madam President. We are very grateful for the suggestions and ideas that they give us.

And so, Madam President, this third budget sets our country and people on a more resilient and inclusive path, consolidating past gains and accelerating progress. It provides for total expenditure, including principal repayments of EC$1,912,822.14. Madam President, the overall summary is as follows:

- Recurrent revenue – EC$1,192.5 million;
- Total grants – EC$72.5 million;

- Recurrent expenditure – EC$1,105.9 million;
- Capital expenditure – EC$496.5 million;
- Current account surplus – EC$86.5 million;
- Principal repayment authorisation – EC$310.5 million;
- Primary deficit after grants – EC$208.6 million; and
- Overall deficit after grants – EC$337.4 million.

Madam President, I am pleased to report that the 2025 Budget is fully financed. **(Applause)** I really want it to sink in. The 2025 Budget is fully financed.

Of note, Madam President, the overall deficit of EC$337.4 million will be largely financed from the drawdown of some EC$283.3 million of Government deposits held in the Consolidated Fund. I wonder if people understand what it means. Madam President, we did well, that saving that we have, we will utilize it, Madam President. Details on and the financing of 2025 Budget can be found on page 9 of the 2025 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. So I would not going into details, Madam President, because I guess, I have another two hours, Madam President.

Madam President: No.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: No?

Madam President: Senator. I think the Clerk has stepped out. Left to me, I think you are in the range of 30 minutes.

Sen. the Hon Adrian Thomas: We can make an agreement, Madam President.

Madam President: Yes, let me hear your offer.

Sen. the Hon Adrian Thomas: All right, Madam President.

Madam President: What is your offer, Senator?

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: It's an hour and a half, so I need another 45 minutes, and then I have another 15 minutes I can ask for.

Madam President: You have what?

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Is it an hour and a half minutes that are allocated to me?

Madam President: Yes.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: So, another 45 minutes.

Madam President: Start with 30.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President.

Madam President: 30 to start. Thank you.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, there are four thematic areas that this Budget is based on.

1. The resilient recovery in the aftermath of Hurricane Beryl;
2. Accelerating our Transformative Agenda;
3. Expanding and Diversifying our Economic Base; and
4. Investing in Cross-Cutting Areas.

Madam President, the first one I would like to look at is the whole question of rebuilding after Beryl. Madam President, this Government, after Beryl, pledged to build back better, especially in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, St. Patrick, the northern part

of Grenada, parts of St. Andrew and St. Mark.

Madam President, I want to place on record here that soon after Beryl, we have so far pumped in excess of EC$100 million into the hands of ordinary Grenadians, in the form of cash grants, building materials and for roof repairs, construction of new homes, business, reactivation support, farm labour and input support, among other critical areas. Madam President, that is how we manage this after Beryl.

Madam President, we have all the intention to make sure that out of bad cometh good, because what I've seen in Carriacou is very encouraging, and I believe that we're on the right path. We believe in restoring people's normal life and also livelihoods within our society, Madam President, where the people of Carriacou really and truly need our assistance. They have shown how resilient they are, and we must encourage them to continue thinking positively and moving forward.

Carriacou has already been cleaned up. The Housing Project is not as fast as we would have liked it to be, but we are moving at a reasonable pace, and people are quite happy; they are quite satisfied, and I guess in Senator Cox's response to the budget, he will give us more details in terms of how happy the people are in Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Madam President, just to highlight some of the finances to support livelihood in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. We have reached out to over 4,862 farmers and 279 fisherfolk in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. In Carriacou alone, Madam President, 49 guarantees amounting to EC$700,000 and 49 loans with a total value of EC$2.1 million.

Madam President, the second area that I would like to look at is accelerating our transformative agenda, and within that area, we'll be looking at the healthcare system, the transformation of education skills, the housing sector and renewable energy. These are the four areas we'll be looking at, Madam President.

When we talk about healthcare, every citizen of this country will desire a much better healthcare system in Grenada. It has been an area that's really and truly, we are not satisfied with over the last couple of decades, and this Administration is bent on doing

something about it, not just recognising it, but doing something about it, and people will hear us talking about project Polaris. It is real. It is coming, and it will be here, Madam President.

And we are not only looking at healthcare for Grenada per se, but we want to really, actually offer service to the OECS in particular and the wider Caribbean, where Grenada can become the capital of medical healthcare in the Caribbean. I must mention here, Madam President, we are working with a reputable company from the United States, Mount Sinai, and we are hoping to get all the consultancy that they can offer to us to make sure that this project is quite successful. **(Applause)**

But most importantly, Madam President, we are thinking of the final product already. We are not building a hospital and then going and looking for staff, going and looking for management. We are thinking about the final product already, and hence the reason why we are putting in this House that this hospital will be statutorised. Statutorisation will be part of the plan, Madam President.

Madam President, National Health Insurance. We are not here to blame anybody. We're not vexed with anybody, but this is something that we have been talking about for a long time, and we want to make it a reality. Presently, we're advancing the legislative work of making sure this happens, and we have allocated some EC$2.4 million to this very important project.

Madam President, the issue of Mental Health and Wellness is a serious area of our country, especially for young people. We cannot afford to abandon and put a stigma on people who have a mental disorder. Madam President, they are our brothers, our sisters, our children, our friends, and we must have a system in place to take care of them. Overall, Madam President, for this 2025 Budget, we have allocated EC$171.3 million to take care of our citizens throughout Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Madam President, another area we're looking at to accelerate our transformative agenda is the whole question of education and skills development in our society. I would not go into much detail because my very competent minister will speak for about an hour and a half **(laughter)**, after I beg, regarding education.

But really and truly, Madam President, we believe that education is liberation. We believe that when you educate your people **(applause)**, if you invest heavily in that, half of your work is completed, and if you don't educate your people, Madam President, we believe that you would have to employ more policemen, build more prisons, have more people study law, get more pink houses, et cetera. Madam President, we don't believe in going that route. We believe we could spend the money now on educating our people and ensuring that you have better citizens in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)** So, we will invest heavily in that, Madam President.

We have started quite efficiently. We have free tuition education in TAMCC and NEWLO. We already have it in secondary school, but we want to continue encouraging people to go to NEWLO and to go to TAMCC to make sure that they have the necessary education.

Madam President, we have invested some EC$800,000 now, where we are trying to have a pilot project to have a transportation system whereby students can have free transportation to take them to school. There is no excuse for children not going to school, and no lunches, because of free lunches and free transportation. We are still giving assistance to people who need uniform assistance, and also those sorts of things. We are creating the enabling environment where Grenadians become educated people.

I've seen countries in the Caribbean, Madam President, whereby they may not have much natural resources, but the level of education in these societies brings them liberation, production, and it makes a better society that each one of us would like to have.

Madam President, our inaugural First-Generation Scholarship Programme in collaboration with a Monroe University, is another area because we are planning, Madam President, we are hoping and we want it and we working towards it, every home in Grenada must have a university graduate student **(applause)**, and if this is not progress with the Congress, then what is? May God bless progress with the Congress. **(Applause)**

Madam President, transforming schools, I must talk about that, but I will not go into details again because we do have quite a few schools commencing… As I speak, there

are plans to start many of them by the end of April or May.

- The St. David's Catholic Secondary School commencing – May 2025;
- St. Andrew Anglican Primary School – May 25;
- St. Giles Government School – July 25;
- The Florida Government School—work is expected to commence there in June 2025;
- The Grenada Christian Academy—under construction, with 20% completed; and
- Dover Government School—construction schedule to commence June 25.

Madam President, all these things will be happening in 2025. So I know that we have a serious problem in Grenada in finding skilled workers, Madam President. The place will get very busy, soon, in 2025.

Madam President, on the issue of Housing. Madam President, our Emergency Housing Recovery Plan is on its way. To date, 147 new houses are at various stages of construction, conducting repairs and providing material assistance. Madam President, 1,866 families have benefited from the material distribution assistance, and the housing project, Madam President, Build Back Better, is bubbling.

And I must admit, Madam President, that Project 500, building homes in Grenadian style at a cheaper rate than the ordinary, we are doing things. We will be providing houses for the people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. You have your land, make a phone call to the Ministry of Housing. You want assistance, make a phone call. There are loans. There are grants. We are making sure that people have a decent place to stay, and children must have a decent place when they come from school to rest their heads, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Another area, Madam President, is the whole question of Renewable Energy. We will be doubling our efforts to make sure that we achieve our goals in terms of energy security and lowering the cost of energy in Grenada. Madam President, we will be investing heavily in geothermal energy, wind energy, and solar PV systems. We have allocated some EC$10 million to make sure that we continue with this project regarding the Geothermal Project that we have started work on.

Most importantly, Madam President, last year in 2024, we invited Grenadians to make use of our offer, a 75% concession on hybrid vehicles imported into this country, and we maintain that. We also have a 100% concession for people who bring in electric vehicles. Madam President, we want to green up the transport sector in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)**

Madam President, one of the other thematic area that we're looking at is expanding and diversifying the economic base of the country and how will we get there? Our intention of getting there, Madam President, we will look at six areas: Tourism… Had it been last year, I would have said Agriculture first, but that's okay, they go hand in hand:

- Tourism;
- Agriculture;
- The Blue Economy;
- Rebuilding a Stronger Economy and People;
- Youth and Sports Development; and
- Digital Transformation.

Madam President, I would like to tackle Tourism first. Madam President, this is maybe one of the most important economic pillars in Grenada presently, at this point in time. Madam President, this vision prioritises economic prosperity, and it has the potential to link many other industries, especially Agriculture, Fisheries, Culture, Infrastructure Development and Education. Lots of cost-cutting areas, and therefore, this is an area that we believe we have not reached our full potential as yet, and we must be able to maximise our full potential regarding Tourism.

Madam President, what is happening in the world with us today? We have all the reasons to invest heavily in this very important industry, and so, going forward, we want to make sure that we enhance our tourism products. We also want to make sure that our people are part of this very important industry. Madam President, we want to make sure that the communities are heavily involved in the Tourism industry, and no longer can we use the term, when we say Grand Anse, we say tourist, so it becomes a kind of synonym, Grand Anse and tourist. Madam President, we are no longer going in that direction.

Tourism is all over Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)**

Madam, President, while we talk about bringing it throughout the state, we want to make sure that the vision is well-grounded in sustainable tourism development, and that is the keyword today, wherever you go: Sustainable Tourism. Because we want to make sure that we prepare and enjoy today, but we secure the future for the generations to come.

Presently, Madam President, this very important sector generates 23.3% of the country's GDP directly; this is a big contribution, but that's not all. Indirectly from other supporting agencies, stakeholders and services, there is another 22.7%, which means, Madam President, that when you double this, it is over 40% tourism contributes to the GDP of this country.

This sector, Madam President, is the sector that also generates foreign exchange together with the Agricultural sector, and we are very happy for that. It facilitates businesses and investment opportunities, and we can see what is happening to St. David now because of this very important sector. It fosters cultural preservation and promotion, and I want to make the point that we are not developing anything whatsoever only for visitors, so when winter is over, everybody goes back, and every project closes up. We are developing projects and businesses and important sites for our people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and when the visitors come to our country, they will enjoy it, Madam President, and come again. **(Applause)**

Madam President, just let me share some statistics regarding what we experienced in the year 2024. We recorded, Madam President, a total of 194,914 stay-over visitors in 2024, as compared to 178,020 arrivals in 2023, an increase of 9.4%, Madam President. There was an average of 3% recording a total of 314,127 in 2024, as compared to 304,627 in 2023, regarding cruise passengers. And, Madam President, although we had COVID-19, in 2024, we are starting to talk about the figures that we had prior to COVID-19, and this is a good sign in terms of where we are going with this very important sector. **(Applause)** Things are getting back to normal, bit by bit.

The United States still remains our key market. The Caribbean is also right there,

and we must… If only we had more airlift within the Caribbean region at a cheaper rate, Caribbean people would have been visiting Grenada more often, but we have to say the good relationship with Trinidad and Tobago, the new relationship we have established with Guyana is increasing gradually, and we are experiencing some good figures there.

Madam President, for 2025, we will definitely be focusing heavily on community tourism, and the Ministry of Tourism is leading that important project. I think it's a project that did very well last year, and we are going to increase the grant to 100%. So last year we worked with $1 million, this year we will be working with $2 million, and we will be going out into the communities and examining the projects that have the potential to be developed, and the ministry will be working very closely with the GTA to make sure that those projects become a reality.

Madam President, as I said in my introduction that this is a brand new ministry that has been formed in 2024. Yes, the Ministry of Tourism existed, but when we configured it, and we believe that putting Culture and the Creative Economy and Tourism together, the synergies, Madam President, would work well, and we believe in going forward we will have a very good ministry that can help build the economy by doing what we do best. Madam President, so the fact that we have a new ministry, we are contemplating heavily on training our staff and making sure we collect more data and working with the various stakeholders.

Key this year, we must have a flagship project regarding upgrading our sites, even though it is one site for 2025, we have to develop them to international standards, and that is the direction the Ministry want to go with this tourism. We believe that, in terms of public awareness, our citizens need to be part of it. In 2025, we will be paying more emphasis on building our public awareness throughout Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. We have been spending quite a bit on mobilising people from the international community to come visit Grenada, but we need to create the kind of awareness within our society because, without the people, hospitality, no matter how many people you bring here, it will not work. So we need to have dialogue with the police, the people in the hospitality industry, with the students, the school children and make sure that we speak

to the public is quite aware of what is happening.

Last but not least, Madam President, we have started a process where we want to have regular dialogue with the people in the diaspora. In February, we had our first meeting with the Ambassadors and people in the various consulates, where we had a discussion with them. We have… They ran ideas with us. We had discussions and we made sure that they used their networking skills to make sure that they help in the process of bringing people.

So there is a lot happening in the Ministry of Tourism and while I am sitting here, I can see the CEO of the Grenada Tourism Authority, all my staff is here the Permanent Secretary and our good and dedicated staff and I know definitely the ministry, GTA and all the other stakeholders, the Hotel Association, they will all help in making this industry the income generating industry.

On the issue of Agriculture, Madam President, the Ministry for Agriculture in the "Other House" spoke extensively in regards to agriculture and I will not regurgitate what he said here in this particular House, but I will, in my wrapping up statement, give some more details in agriculture, but we have allocated in the field of some EC$32 million in income support to the farm labourers after Hurricane Beryl, and all these monies have been pumped into the economy hence the reason why the place is getting back busy and people are living a very happy life at this point in time, but we want to make them happier as we move forward. An allocation of $32 million has been made in the 2025 Estimates to fund various projects in the Agricultural sector.

Madam President, there is a brand new ministry under the Ministry of Agriculture, the Blue Economy and the Marine Affairs. This ministry, Madam President, has been thought about for a very long time since we came into office. I am happy that the Prime Minister has made the decision to establish that ministry. There are a lot of resources, Madam President, we have to harness in that particular area, which could again help in generating as much foreign exchange as possible.

Madam President, in the areas of Youth and Sports Development, this is another area we are trying to invest very heavily in youth development because we believe that

the potential that our sports can generate, Madam President, is tremendous. And as I said before, we need to have more Kirani's, we need to have more Anderson Peters, and we are heavily investing in our playing fields and our recreational facilities. We are lighting up those fields, we are making sure that people can come from work, come from school and go in the evening… they don't have to fight for the daylight, Madam President, this is something that we believe is a very viable industry, and we are moving swiftly on that.

In 2025, we will be focusing heavily on… As a matter of fact, by June 2025, we are hoping that the National Stadium will be lit and we will have night cricket and night sports in the cricket stadium. **(Applause)**

Some key initiatives in 2025 for the youth development: the Youth Parliament, we want to focus on that heavily, the skills development programmes, expanding training beyond traditional skills to include digital economy skills, entrepreneurship and innovation and ensuring our youth are equipped for the jobs of the future. There is no reason why children should leave school without being versed in digital gadgets and all that it takes in terms of technology moving forward.

We also have a programme in 2025, which is referred to as the Elevate Her Programme. This is a programme for young ladies and Senator Seville Francis will expound on that sometime tomorrow…. Thursday, sorry. Thursday. Thank you very much.

Madam President, investing in some cross-cutting areas. We believe these are the areas that will move our society and create the kind of synergy needed. We cannot avoid developing physical infrastructure and transforming our physical infrastructure. So many other industries depend on the physical infrastructure in your country; the transport industry, the tourism industry, and the agricultural sector all depend on that, so we need to look at that. The physical infrastructure needs to be developed.

The Social and Community Development Programmes, which include people's development, Madam President, are very, very important. Mobilisation Implementation and Transformation, this is a brand new ministry that was created to make sure that we have the necessary human resources to make sure that when we mobilise monies from

outside of Grenada, we can implement it and utilise it without having to send any funds to donors and so on.

Madam President, we want to promote private sector development. We want to modernise the labour relations. The whole question of the minimum wage, Madam President. The minimum wage is an area that has been bothering Grenadians for years. It was last dealt with in 2010 when the National Democratic Congress was in office. Today we are revisited, reviewed and implemented, and we are happy to say that people are quite comfortable where we are now, but this is something we need to review, maybe every five years. So we will be modernising the labour relations, and I think the Ministry of Labour is working extensively to make sure that this thing happens.

Enhancing the governance of statutory bodies. We have done so. Many of the directors have been going through some training. We also have a handbook to guide directors on how they can operate when they are in a statutory body.

The National Security, Home Affairs, Information and Disaster Management, Madam President, I am so happy to talk about the… Grenadians will no longer have to fill out an immigration form when they travel. We are now, if not the last in the Caribbean, to really and truly go that route, but we are happy that we have some new machines at the airport. We had three before, and we have about six kiosk machines now, so this is a good sign, and we are moving in that direction. **(Applause)** Madam President, we have allocated some EC$155.7 million to this worthy cause for some of the cost-cutting measures.

Madam President, how much time do I have?

Madam President: Let me ask the Clerk for an accurate count of minutes. It's in the vicinity of 10 minutes, he has? 12 minutes? It's according to our clock, 12 minutes, sir.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: All right, Madam President. Madam President, thank you. Madam President, promoting private sector development is another cross-

cutting area that we cannot ignore, and the GIDC is doing a lot of work in terms of mobilising people to start new businesses in Grenada. We have a responsibility as a Government to strengthen the GIDC, and the figures recorded this year show they have generated some 238 investment leads, with local investments leading the way. Furthermore, Madam President, this Administration is prepared to invest some EC$80 million in projects that will result when the GIDC approve their projects. So this is a very important aspect for our concern.

Madam President, to build a strong momentum, the Government is committed to enhancing the GIDC capacity and effectiveness in 2025, and some key areas that we want to look at are expanding investment promotion efforts, streamlining the investment approval process, leveraging strategic partnerships and leveraging the hosting of the Afro Caribbean Trade and Investment Conference in July this year. This will be a very, very **(applause)** important project, and I'm asking Grenadians to really and truly keep your ears open, keep your eyes open and be a part of this very important conference that will take place in Grenada. It is something that Grenada needs at this point in time, and I know that the Prime Minister is very instrumental in encouraging the Afro Caribbean Trade Investment Conference to take place in Grenada, and I really and truly want to encourage Grenadians to be part of it.

Madam President, we want to support the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) development, and it is something that has been there for a long time, and this Government is very happy to reposition some EC$7 million in existing funds at the Grenada Development Bank. We want to recapitalise the Small Business Development Fund administered to the GDB with an injection of EC$3 million. The provision of competitive matching and innovation grants of up to EC$30,000 per beneficiary through the Grenada Investment Development Bank as part of the OECS skills and innovation projects. This is an area that we are going to be investing heavily in, and we are hoping to get a good outcome from it, Madam President.

The CBI Programme is a programme that has served us well for the last two years. Grenada, together with three other Caribbean islands, will be establishing an independent

regional regulator for the industry. Legislation, drafting and consultation have commenced with the plan to have an independent regional regulator operational by May 2026. So the CBI Programme is a programme that we continue to invest heavily in. We continue to mobilise people to come and invest in Grenada, and we are seeing the benefits of it today. We are hoping to pay more attention to it in 2025 and 2026.

But, Madam President, this Government, in the coming weeks, will pass an amended regulation to reduce, and I want to reemphasise here, to reduce by 70% all fees that are to be paid by local Grenadian developers. **(Applause)** So it's not only a programme for foreign investors, but we want it to be a programme where Grenadians, our ordinary people, at home and abroad, can be part and parcel of this very Citizenship by Investment Programme that is taking place in Grenada.

Madam President, another cross-cutting area is the question of our National Security, as I said before that we are very happy to mobilise people on the basis that our country is a free country. It's a safe country. You can feel safe in Grenada. You can walk the streets and feel quite comfortable without looking over your shoulder, and we want to maintain that. So our Government is embarking heavily on reducing crime in our country, with the little that we have. I mean, when you talk to people outside of Grenada, we believe that we have a lot of crime here, but we don't have any crime at all, but we will still want to… We believe that one is too much, and we will work assiduously to make sure that anything we can do to reduce the little that we have, we will do exactly that.

Legislation will be introduced for the installation of CCTV cameras, closed-circuit cameras, and we want to make sure that the legislation is timely and well-suited.

Madam President, the establishment of the Royal Grenada Police Force Headquarters that has been on our mind for years and come 2025, we will have the opening of the brand new Police Headquarters on the Carenage, **(applause)** something we should be very proud of.

His Majesty's Prison is something that has to be addressed. I am sure many of you do not know that this building may be an 18th-century building or a 17th-century building. It's a very old building in modern times, and we want to address that. It may not

be addressed in 2025, but we want to make sure that in a year or two, we do something about improving the living conditions and the restructuring of a brand new prison at some point in time.

Madam President, even the Grenville Police Station in the middle of town is not adequate for the people there, and we will be trying to see if we could get a new station for the police officers who work in that particular station in Grenville.

Right. Madam President, I have to cut some slides, but I want to make sure that I present the gist. Madam President, there are two particular issues. I now leave the cross-cutting issues that are very important, and I want to deal with two particular issues that I think we need to consider. To support our transformative agenda, the following structures will be implemented in 2025. One is the development and implementation of a policy for the procurement, maintenance, and disposal of Government vehicles. This is a soaring issue that we want to address.

Too many times, the way Government vehicles have been treated, the way we handle it. We are really and truly playing with taxpayers' money. We want to make sure that just as people are taking care of their personal vehicles, they find the same way of taking care of Government vehicles **(applause)**, and we're going to put systems in place to make sure that that happens. When you have a vehicle for 12 to 15 years, maybe you're spending more on maintenance than anything else, so we want to review that and make sure that this thing does not haunt us.

Madam President, the issue of importing used vehicles. Many of us would agree that this is becoming a serious problem. I was driving up Molinere road the last time, and the number of vehicles parked on the road, I was wondering if it's a new parking spot that was opened, and it is, because we do have a serious problem with parking. People are bringing in vehicles; many years ago, probably you had one vehicle per home. Today, if it's five of you all in the house, everybody wants their own vehicle, and the road is becoming a parking lot.

So, in going forward, Madam President, we have to control that. We have to control it before it controls us, because you may find yourself where you were taking 15

minutes to get to town from where you were living, now you're taking an hour because the roads cannot accommodate all the vehicles we have in Grenada. So something has to be done about it and we would be looking at this in 2025. By June 2025, you will be hearing from the Government, and we will be consulting with you on the matter to determine how we handle used vehicles coming to Grenada and how we handle the quantity of vehicles that Grenada can accommodate. The last statistic showed that there are 68,000 vehicles actively on the road in Grenada in a population of just 110,000 people.

Madam President, there are some serious areas that we need to look at regarding…

Madam President: Senator, you are in the vicinity of about three minutes.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, can I beg for another 15 minutes as legislated by the…

Madam President: How many minutes do you actually need? Your minimum, what's your minimum? Need…

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: 15 minutes would be fine. If you are pressed for time, I can accommodate 10.

Madam President: I'd appreciate that. Thank you. I thank you.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you very much, Madam President.

Madam President: Thank you, sir. Continue.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, cost of living measures. This Government, Madam President, has taken some serious steps to mitigate the impact of

inflation over the years. And we want to continue on this pathway because we believe that our people deserve to be comfortable, and a lot of the time, things are imposed on our society, not because of our actions and inactions, but because of external activities that are taking place that we have no say about. We have nothing to do with the war in Ukraine, but when the war begins, the cost of freight goes up, and the impact is created. So, as a very concerned Government, we believe that we have to put measures in place to make sure that we can take care of our people and reduce the shock as much as possible.

Madam President, one of the first…the extension of VAT exemptions is something we will continue, and we have had a long list of goods that are VAT exempted, and we will… We have 20 basic items already there, and we'll be looking at some more items that we can also have in the list regarding being VAT-exempt. And the Government is forgoing some EC$3.1 million in that particular area.

Madam President, maintain the fixed price on cooking gas. Even though it's a burden, we are forgoing some EC$2 million there, but the 20-pound cylinder of gas will remain at EC$40. We know it's worth much more than that, but we believe that the majority of our people must eat, you must cook, and have gas in their houses, so we do not want to remove that at this point in time.

Madam President, last year, from the 1st of January, we reduced the duty that was paid on the gas from EC$5.50 per gallon. We removed EC$2 from it. It is now EC$3.50. We're going to maintain that to make sure that our people are quite comfortable. And we want to encourage people to be very conservative in driving and running around because you do not want to just drive for driving's sake. We are not reducing the price for people to do extra unnecessary running around; we want to reduce the price so that people can be comfortable regarding the high cost of fuel. Something again we don't have, we need, and the increase in prices is not our fault.

Madam President, to support the low-income households, Government will maintain the EC$10 monthly electricity subsidy for all residential consumers using up to 99 kilowatts per month at an estimated cost of EC$3 million. So again, the Government

is subsidising that, and we will maintain that.

The public transport subsidies. Government is introducing public transport subsidies to support bus operators and maintain affordability for commuters. Again, Madam President, for over 20 years, maybe the bus prices haven't gone anywhere, and we are feeling the pain. However, Government is responsible for regulating, so we have an option: either we increase the price, or we give the bus owners a leeway, or we subsidise and help the bus owners to mitigate some of the high cost of meeting their daily routes.

So this Administration will be looking to see what we can do especially for the busses in Grenada to make sure that we have a fair balance equation where the commuters pay a decent bus fee and the busses are not taken advantage of in terms of them overspending in terms of maintaining and maintaining their cost. Madam President, those are some of the measures.

In conclusion, I just want the Grenadian public to know that as we reflect on the 2024 journey of where we came from, and how we made it through 2024, we believe that the measure that we have put in place for 2025, and as I indicated in my introduction, while the economy grew by 3.7% last year, we expect it to grow by 4.5%, but we would not get complacent. We would not take things for granted. We will make sure that whatever measures we put in place, we are prudent about it, and we do not know what the future holds. We had Beryl in 2024; what will be the case in 2025? We don't know. So we must put measures in place to make sure that anything that comes on the Grenadian people will be able to withstand it, good or bad.

Madam President, as we celebrate these achievements that we have made in 2025, we remain ever mindful that our work is not over. We press forward knowing that our strength and wisdom came not from ourselves but from God the Almighty. Madam President, as we look ahead in 2025, we call on Grenadians to unite. We call on all Grenadians to participate. There is a saying that I do not want to take part in politics, but I say to people, if you do not want to be part of politics, politics is going to take part of you, and you do not want that to happen. You do not want political decisions to be taken, and

you do not have an input because when those guys in Inland Revenue come, they do not want to know whether you are Pentecostal, a carpenter, a farmer, or a politician; it's across the board. So, I encourage Grenadians to be mindful of our society, be mindful of the decisions that the Government is taking and feel free to participate. There will be a number of town hall meetings. There are a number of consultations. Be a citizen, be a patriot and be part of moving Grenada forward.

Madam President, in closing, it will be remiss of me if I do not take this opportunity to thank all our friends and partners who have helped us throughout our journey. As you can appreciate, our list of acknowledgements is extremely long. Therefore, a detailed list can be found in Appendix 3 of the Budget Statement.

Permit me, however, Madam President, to say thank you to God Almighty, and allow us to reiterate our sincere gratitude to the Prime Minister and our Cabinet colleagues for preparing this Budget. The Permanent Secretary and staff in the Ministry of Finance have done an extremely important job, and we wish to acknowledge them. The statutory and state-owned enterprises, we said thank you very much, and I must say special thanks to the Attorney General and her staff, the Cabinet Secretary, the Director of GIS and the staff, the Press Secretary and many others who played various roles in the Budget and Presentation. I wish to record my thanks to you, Madam President, and the Clerk of Parliament and his staff who have given me full support in facilitating this delivery of my presentation.

Once again, I say thank you very much and I look forward to two days of extensive debate on this very generous, nation-building budget that will shape the future of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. I thank you very much. **(Applause)**

Madam President: I thank the Leader of Government's Business in the Senate, Honourable Senator Adrian Thomas, for his prolific presentation of a prolific budget. I wish to acknowledge the thanks directed towards the overall leadership of the Senate in facilitating you. Thank you for thanking us.

But I also want to thank your staff and your associates, many of whom are now leaving. They obviously came to support you. Duty done. Goodbye. **(Laughter)** I want to thank those of you and to say maybe we can take a stretch in place so we can stand and stretch. I notice the school children are a little bit tired. They may wish for water or a stretch. So we take a one-and-a-half-minute stretch in place break, and we come back to hear the Leader of Government's Business in the Opposition.

Senate adjourned at 11:18 a.m.

Senate resumed at 11:26 a.m.

Madam President: Thank you for your graciousness, everyone. I would now like to offer the floor, but before I do, I want to urge… well, let me first indicate that we will aim to conclude at six o'clock today, and that does require… There are several slots after lunch, and I would want all the slots to be filled with speakers, an hour per person maximum, so that we make the progress that we should in terms of getting the debate delivered in a timely manner before we close on Thursday.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation on both sides of the aisle, and now I offer the floor to the Leader of Opposition's Business in the Senate, the Honourable man from Carriacou, Honourable Senator Norland Cox. Senator Cox, you have the floor. Thank you.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Thank you very much, Madam President. I see that you have some manoeuvring to do, but we are going to work with you.

Madam President: You will help me.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: As I always do, Madam President.

Madam President: Indeed.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Norland Cox

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Madam President, let me first extend a warm welcome to all our visitors, especially our students who are here with us in the gallery. This is a very important exercise for our country and especially for our young ones, as this Motion before us paves the way for a number of things to happen in the country. But, Madam President, I just want to commence by indicating how truly blessed I am to be here and to be endured by the mercies of the heavenly father and recognising that all things are possible through him. **(Applause)**

Madam President, it is my understanding that the delayed presentation of this year's Budget is attributed to the implementation of a new budget software and the impact, of course, of Hurricane Beryl. While the latter is indeed a significant event, it should have been an even greater reason, Madam President, for the timely preparation of the 2025 Budget, given the urgent need for immediate investment in the economy to bolster an already sluggish recovery effort. **(Applause)**

The explanations, Madam President, that were provided do not justify such a delay in fulfilling one of the most critical responsibilities of the Government to this nation. I remain steadfast, Madam President, in my assessment that the Government's attempts to achieve its so-called transformational agenda have remained very much elusive. Therefore, Madam President, my contribution will focus on reporting achievements for 2024 and the outline plans for 2025 as provided by the Estimates.

One of the beauties, Madam President, of the Parliament, when we debate this Motion, we do have an opportunity to transcend into the "Other Place" where the Motion commenced, because I think it's important for us to capture everything, as this Motion is very impactful and very important.

The presentation of the 2025 Budget was crafted much, Madam President, like a carnival masquerade, and I say it in the context that they mover of the Motion is the Minister for Culture so I think he will understand much more, hence the reason why I used that and just coming out of Carriacou's Carnival, I think that again will help for all to understand why I use that description carnival masquerade.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Norland Cox

Madam President, this Budget is designed to distract, disguise its true nature. Beneath the surface lies weak economic investment in the economy, enormous wastage, poor management, structural deficits and an uninspiring economic outlook, Madam President. **(Applause)** This Budget does not embody the vision and hope required to propel Grenada's growth and development for the next 50. That I'm very convinced, Madam President, this Budget is far short of that.

Madam President, while I do not claim to be an expert in electrical engineering, I do know that faulty wiring can cause transformers to burn. Perhaps, Madam President, this is an analogy of the so-called transformation efforts that this Government seem to be suffering from a similar fate.

Madam President, the economy. The Grenadian economy has shown clear signs of slowing down, even amid reconstruction efforts post-Hurricane Beryl, which should spur economic growth. Madam President, one of the fastest ways to grow any economy is through infrastructure development, and even with all this development that is taking place post-Beryl, we still have slow economic growth. **(Applause)**

According to the Budget Statement on page 11, GDP growth was 3.7% in 2024 and it's projected to be a mere 4% in 2025; those are the numbers, Madam President, so I am not speaking by guess. These figures do not inspire confidence in a robust economic rebound, Madam President, it does not.

Furthermore, we had several discussions on the whole issue of the deficit Budget. Madam President, I think we recognise that previous budgets were presented in this place. I mean, that is a fact. While some may say that it is not an issue, but I think it is important, Madam President, to highlight some clear things, and when I said that the presentation is a masquerade, I'll give you a little example.

Madam President, on page 13 of the Budget Statement, figure 5.2, and you know, coincidentally, the mover of the Motion, Leader of Government's Business, actually read it out; he read it, and I was surprised that he read it and said, I quote, Madam President, "I am pleased to report that the 2025 Budget is fully financed"… Yes? "Of note, the overall deficit of $337.4 million will be largely funded".

Madam President, and I stop right here. We move from fully financed to largely financed, **(applause)** that is a difference, Madam President. He said it was largely financed, not fully financed, by a sum, a drawdown of EC$287.3 million. Madam President, I see a shortfall of EC$50 million plus, so I stand corrected for some guidance on that going forward on where the next EC$50 million plus is coming from. So it is a deficit budget by nature and by construct.

However, Madam President, when we consider historic shortfalls in grant funding and other underperforming revenue sources, this deficit can easily widen, Madam President. So it is of concern, hence the reason why we have a Loan Bill before us.

Madam President, we understand the theatrics. You don't want to give the context that you are borrowing to finance the budget, but that is the case, Madam President. A well-constructed budget should not merely reflect economic parameters. It must instil confidence in the business sector, provide comfort for investors and offer hope for families across this nation. **(Applause)** Madam President, the Member did agree with me on that.

Madam President, the only area where the Government seems to be over-performing or overspending is on overseas travel for the big leagues and the "sors". Madam President, we have a few "sors" around. Every ministry has two or three "advisors". Those are the "sors", Madam President. That's where the performance is taking place, and we see just in 2024 alone a sum of EC$8 million is spent on overseas travel, Madam President.

While we hope for the success of the Government economic strategy, the reality is, Madam President, the chosen pathway continues to create some of the most challenging economic conditions for businesses, investors and ordinary citizens alike, Madam President.

Madam President, I have to respond to a few mentions by the Leader of Government's Business, and one of them has to do with Kawana Bay, Madam President. If I could recall clearly, he did say the Kawana Bay matter was resolved, and there is work in terms of getting investors. Madam President, if I recall correctly, there was a ceremony

sometime back. There was also an announcement of a transfer of the Riviera lot for a said investor, and of course, that investor should have acquired the Kawana Bay and started moving forward with the development of the property. Now, we are hearing that there is a search for investors.

Madam President, I hope some clarity can be brought to this matter because I am somewhat confused. I was hoping to hear that work will commence. So maybe the Attorney General in her deliberation can speak to that because I know her chamber is part and parcel of those negotiations, and it was said that the Riviera lot was going to be used for, I think, the Heroes Park or something of that nature. So I just wanted to raise that for some clarity, Madam President.

Madam President, he also spoke about the strengthening of the Parliamentary Offices. When I heard him speak about increases, I really thought we were getting another increase, you know, Madam President. Because I know we deliberated that on the last budget. So, when I heard him say it, I was a little bit excited. I said, "More money again", but worried too at the same time. So I'm just a little bit concerned why, you know, why it was raised because we deliberated extensively on that and the 2024 Budget Debate.

But as it regards the issue of a vehicle for the Parliamentary Office, I believe that is being proposed, Madam President, I could speak more with confidence in terms of Carriacou, and it's a major concern in the use of Government vehicles. I mean, I can tell you, right now, there is clear evidence. I have seen it. People sleeping in Government vehicles like it's their personal vehicles. So I think that is something that the ministry, the Government needs to look carefully into in terms of how Government vehicles are being used and managed currently.

Madam President, and I will speak to the whole issue of unemployment in a little bit, but I want to speak to page 74 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, and the document indicates that… It shows that table in terms of revenues for 2024, the Government were able to amass about EC$1.6 million in recurrent revenues in 2024, largely due to an EC$500 million plus revenue intake from the CBI, now branded IMA.

Madam President, even with this increase in revenue, the Government had serious difficulty in terms of implementing and executing some of those projects for 2024. **(Applause)** Now, we are seeing for 2025 a projection for less revenue, a drop to about EC$1.1 million, largely due again to a reduction in CBI and IMA projections.

So I am somewhat confused, Madam President. How do they plan to achieve this with less revenue and with less time to implement the budget? We are almost in Lent. We're getting ready for Easter. Madam President, I think the first quarter is getting ready to close off, and we have not commenced any implementation of the 2025 Budget as yet. So I am confused. How are we going to achieve what we seek to do with less funding and less time to implement? I think that is something that should be… remember I said, Madam President, masquerade. Masquerade, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President, you know one of the things that stood out to me from the presentation is the issue of IMANI, and I want to take it up front. Sometimes, if you are not in a position to understand the challenges and limitations of some of our young folks, and what the IMANI Programme would have provided for them. We are not saying that the programme is perfect. We are not saying that the programme didn't have challenges. But, Madam President, to say that the programme gave a false assurance is a false statement. **(Applause)**

Madam President, the young men and women who are now chefs today, the young men and women who are now engineers today, the young men and women who are working at various institutions and organisations came through the ranks of the IMANI Programme. I don't understand how you are saying that their achievement through the programme is one that gives false assurance. I don't get it. I don't understand it.

Madam President, this programme with all its inadequacies would have created immense opportunities for a number of young men and women in this country, and that's a fact, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President, Employment. Madam President, in reviewing the medium-term fiscal framework and other related reports, this paints a very troubling picture for our nation's economic management, and some of the key issues that stand out, Madam

President, are rising debt and poor fiscal management.

Madam President, the debt with GDP is projected to reach 57.1% by year's end, in due part, that's the Government's report to Beryl's response. Madam President, I am saying this in the context that the member presented that the debt is going down, but the document presented by the Ministry of Finance says that the debt is increasing. So I am not sure if the presenter of the Motion, Madam President, actually saw this, so I wanted to raise that so that he understands that debt is not going down. The debt is increasing, according to the Ministry of Finance projections.

And, Madam President, this debt is increasing despite this Government receiving EC$118 million pay out **(applause)**, 14 days after the hurricane; despite that, the debt is still increasing. Madam President, this raises serious questions about the fiscal responsibility and management at this current time.

Madam President, Inflation. The issue of inflation has continued to be a thorn, not just on the backs, but on the pockets of every citizen, especially persons living in Beryl's ravaged communities. Madam President, the report states… That is the same Medium Term Fiscal Report. It states that food inflation remains high at 3.6%. Food prices rise, while fuel inflation saw a modest decline. Madam President, those are the words of the Ministry of Finance. Not my words. Those are the words of the Ministry of Finance. It is clear that inflation is an issue of major concern.

Madam President, I heard in the presentation the Budget Statement, and I smiled, because I recall in terms of the fiscal measures to deal with inflation and cost of living, last year's presentation, in the Minister for Finance reading the fiscal measures, the one that got the most attention, was the removal of VAT on condoms, Madam President. This year, the one that really had the Chamber rolling was the removal of that and panty liners, Madam President. That is what is receiving most attention, Madam President. That is what is in the document. That is what is presented that is… So, I'm saying this, Madam President, that look at what receives the attention in terms of fiscal measures to alleviate inflation, that is what stood out, Madam President.

Madam President, Unemployment. This is a very concerning one for us. From the

document on pages 19 and 22, it states, "Women continue to face higher unemployment rates". I want to repeat that. That is not my words. That's the word of the Ministry of Finance. "Women continue to face higher…

Madam President: Excuse me. Someone is constantly speaking. I am hearing two voices. I am not sure where that is happening. Sorry.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: That's all right.

Madam President: Only one speaker should be heard, and that's because only one speaker should be speaking. Thank you. Continue.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Thank you, Madam President. "Women continue to face higher unemployment rates of 15.8% compared to men, 7.2%". Youth and Employment, again, Madam President, the youth unemployment crisis persists within the ages of 15 and 24, suffering the highest rates of joblessness in this country. Those are not my figures. Madam President, those are the figures of this Government, this Administration, this Ministry of Finance. So, I'm only stating what you presented here. So, Madam President, I hope I do not get any knock for that. I didn't make up these numbers, Madam President.

Madam President, I'll say it in the context that this Government touted investing in young people. They touted, "Putting young people first and investing in them now", but the numbers do not reflect, Madam President. Masquerade. Masquerade. Madam President, little or no progress has been made since the 2023 labour force survey, showing a clear lack of strategic intervention, Madam President.

Madam President, on page 12 of the said document, which has to do with the Investment by Migration. Madam President, you see, it is important for us to look at these numbers. It's important for us to highlight them in the context of what is taking place and what is not happening. So, Madam President, the newly rebranded IMA, formerly called

Citizenship By Investment Programme, reported a whopping 58.5% revenue increase in 2024, some EC$553 million plus collected, Madam President. But what is most alarming, not a single new project, Madam President, has been initiated. **(Applause)** Not one single new investment, even after having record revenues from the investment by migration, not a single investment, Madam President. So, it's very concerning for me. It's very concerning. So the question is, where is the accountability? Where are the tangible benefits for persons, Madam President?

Madam President, we come back to the youths. I know that, I'm not certain who might be the person who might speak directly to the youths on the "Other Side", but it must be concerning for the Ministry of Youth. I'm quite certain it must be concerning. If I were the person leading the Ministry of Youth right now, Madam President, I would be concerned. I'm being very honest. I'm being very honest. We've seen, Madam President, what is presented: a 21.5% cut in youth investment. **(Applause)** That is the number. I am not making these numbers up. There might be some other investment I don't know about, but I am only presenting what is before us, Madam President.

The Division of Youth's budget was slashed by EC$14.2 million, and that is equivalent to that percentage, the amount that I highlighted. Madam President, the question is, what message are we sending if less investment is made in young people? How do we expect to address youth unemployment? How do we expect to create opportunities for young people without investing in them? These are the questions. How are we going to do this? I say masquerading.

Madam President, these figures that we're seeing signal one thing. It signals that we need immediate and urgent attention to address the concerns and, of course, the opportunities for our young people. Madam President, this is very concerning. This is very concerning.

It is clear, Madam President, and probably for want of a better word, the youths have been abandoned. Yes. I stand corrected, Madam President, but that is how I am feeling based on what I'm seeing here, and based on what transpired over the past fiscal cycle, Madam President. Little or no engagement opportunity for our young people.

There are no clear specific policy initiatives, and I stand corrected, Madam President. If there are, and, of course, this in itself puts a hurdle, if not a stumbling block, in the pathway of our young people who, of course, want to realise their dreams and aspirations, Madam President. Government has a responsibility to invest in the future, which is our young people, and this budget does not reflect such. **(Applause)** It does not reflect such.

Madam President, I want to move on to Healthcare. You know, for me, Madam President, I'm speaking for me, personally; my personal opinion. This is one of the sectors that every time I speak in this place, I am somewhat guarded as to how far I go, understanding the implications, understanding what healthcare means, in the context of a nation. It transcends aisle. It transcends political parties. It transcends social class, Madam President, because we all will get sick at some point in time, Madam President.

So when I stand here and make comments in the context of the Ministry of Health, I make them in an honest, genuine and meaningful way, Madam President. I'm saying we are right now, it is, it is scary and unacceptable, Madam President. **(Applause)** It is.

We understand that healthcare has been a challenge, not only for this country, Madam President, but for many countries. It's a fact that what was inherited was a good enough platform for this Government to build on **(applause)**, but they deteriorated it, Madam President, and we have evidence to show, Madam President; to show, Madam President.

Time and time again, we have seen that the New Nation Party Administration has to come and do the hard things or deal with the difficult projects, Madam President. We have… Our resume shows that. **(Applause)** We, as a party in Government, have made the most investment, the most investment, in healthcare in this country, Madam President.

Madam President, you know, time is a funny thing. You know, time is a funny thing, but if there was a direct relation between time and performance, then I could say so, but that is not the case. There are persons who hold certain positions and responsibilities for years, and they have not done anything, and there are persons who have held them in a shorter time frame and would have performed, so the issue is not

about time, Madam President. **(Applause)** The issue is about commitment. **(Applause)** The issue is about competence, and we have shown that, Madam President. We have shown that.

Madam President: I'm hearing comments.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: That's fine, Madam President,

Madam President: No, it's not fine.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Yes, it's fine. It's fine. Don't worry

Madam President: You can listen and take notes like in school. The rules are there. We are operating under the rules of the debate, Standing Order, No. 38, 41 on the Decorum and 42 on the Duties of the Presiding Officer, and so on. I didn't want to discuss this. I can't follow the trend of the conversation when there's a commentary in place. Can you please?

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Should I continue, Madam President?

Madam President: No. I'm trying to locate where the… because even as I'm speaking, I'm hearing the comment. So, I remind our visitors, do not comment; you have to listen. You don't have the privilege of commenting, and our colleagues already know the rules. Thank you, continue.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, my colleagues knocked the table over there, you know, I wasn't expecting that. You know, I think, they don't understand that everything I do is deliberate and purposeful. Madam President, I was expecting that, and they knocked the table in the context that the

New National Party Administration has been in Government for a longer period than the NDC Administration. I think it's probably coming up on 13 to 23, Madam President. But there's a reason why they were given that time, Madam President. It's not by guess. There was a clear reason because the better choice had the longer time to serve **(applause)**, and that's a fact. That's a fact, Madam President. So don't get so excited, Madam President, through you, Madam President, on the "Other Side".

Madam President, we can speak of some of the achievements because it is important. It's important, Madam President. It's important. So, address the context in which we speak regarding healthcare. Madam President, the new hospital wing, Accident and Emergency. We have a new dialysis unit. Yes, Madam President. The Diagnostic Radiology unit, all those, Madam President, were the platform that was handed over to this administration, Madam President. **(Applause)** Expanding the ambulance fleet, Madam President, and an upgrade in the primary healthcare at the Gouyave Poly Clinic, Madam President. I mean, there is so much that we can say… The hospital in Carriacou, the health centre in Hillsborough, Madam President. There is so much investment that we have made, and my colleague will expand more on Health, Madam President.

Madam President, the Government plans to build a new hospital. It's commendable in principle, but let us be clear, Madam President. A new building doesn't automatically translate into better healthcare services. It does not. The core issues in healthcare are not merely physical infrastructure, Madam President, but there are softer issues, Madam President, such as human resources, service efficiency and unclear policy direction. Madam President, even though concerning is this Government's poor track record in implementing infrastructure projects. Poor track record. **(Applause)** Poor track record. We can list them, you know. We can list them.

This morning, my colleague, Madam President, raised the issue of the Grenville Commercial Complex. Madam President, I was the Minister for Infrastructure. There was a signed contract to commence implementation of the Grenville Commercial Complex; to date, it hasn't started, and I could speak to many more. We could speak to the Molinere

Project, the Molinere Land Slip, which had cost overruns and time overruns. I don't know what is outstanding about that, Madam President, probably more than twice the amount, Madam President.

Madam President, when we build, Madam President, we are blamed for being a concrete government, Madam President. But, Madam President, we are confident that the investment that we have made has really and truly helped this country to grow. We made investments in sports, Madam President. I mean, you name it, roads and other infrastructures, Madam President. We can speak, in the case of Carriacou, of the desalination plant. I mean, it's just numerous, Madam President, numerous to mention, and those things are transformative, Madam President.

Madam President, the real crisis in our healthcare system today is not just about building, but it's about the acute shortage of medical professionals, Madam President. It is a major concern. Our nurses and doctors are forced to work double shifts just to keep the system running. It's really tough, Madam President. What does this lead to? This overburden of the staff has led to burnout among healthcare workers, reduced quality of patient care, long wait times for essential services, just to name a few, Madam President. So, Madam President, these are some critical issues. The calls from the public are deafening, Madam President. The public is not satisfied with our current healthcare services. They are not satisfied, especially within our hospitals and clinics.

Madam President, despite the large budget allocations last year and previous years by this Administration over the past three years, the system has not worked. It has not improved, Madam President. It has not improved. No amount of meandering can get away from that, so something needs to be done, Madam President. **(Applause)** So, something needs to be done.

Madam President, even more shocking is the staggering under implementation of the health budget. Last year, we had an EC$24 million unspent… No last year… The year before the last, we had EC$27 million unspent, Madam President, and at the last fiscal cycle, it went down a little bit to EC$24 million unspent. So, you could see a recurring trend there, Madam President, in excess of EC$20 million not being spent every

year in such an important sector. I thought we would want to see overspending as we are seeing on those luxurious overseas travels, Madam President.

This consistent failure, Madam President, to utilise those funds effectively should serve as a warning, Madam President, as the Government seeks to build this new hospital. They need to focus on why this implementation is not taking place, and maybe the pipeline might be blocked, so we need to look into that.

Madam President, I just don't stand here and just critique, but Madam President, I think it's important that we offer suggestions on how we move forward. Madam Present, in terms of a strategic approach going forward, we believe that a strategic focus should be on strengthening the primary healthcare. Madam Present, investing in primary health care, by investing in preventing even community-based care, we can reduce burnouts at the hospital. We can improve early diagnosis and treatment and provide better health care outcomes for our Grenadians, Madam President. **(Applause)** That is what we're suggesting. However, given this Administration's poor track record on health care delivery, it is no surprise that this sector continues to decline, Madam President. Madam President, health care is not a luxury. It is the fundamental right, and that is the words from the 2022 Budget Presentation. I remember, Madam President, so I just reiterate for us to remember.

Madam President, Infrastructure Development. There is not much I can say because not much is going on, Madam President, in infrastructure development. You know, a lot of our key major projects are either not started, or what is being worked on is either delayed. Madam President, this is critical. You know, our roads, I don't even know where to start, and I guess as many commuters on the roadway don't even know where to pass as well, Madam President. We all can resonate that our roads are terrible. **(Applause)** Terrible.

We have not heard any concrete plans to address them, but what we recognise is more remedial work, patching. That is from the budget; that is what I capture. I stand correctly. If there are any specific projects to treat with our roadways, Madam President, I stand corrected.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Norland Cox

Madam President, you know, in the "Other Place" there was a presentation about lights and lighting playing fields. I mean, I couldn't believe. I mean, I wasn't sure I was watching the same… You know, because I recall, Madam President, in the Springs Playing Field, I was there when we started digging the foundations for the poles to be erected, so I don't know how all of a sudden the lighting of the playing fields became an achievement for that individual, Madam President. Of course, he turned on the switch for the lights. I think he is mistaken in his explanation of what he really wants to say. So, if he comes and says that he was able to turn on the lights. I agree, yes, he turned on the lights, but to say that you're responsible for lighting the playing field, Madam President, I think that is grossly untrue and grossly misleading the public when you do that, Madam President.

You know, Madam President, the La Sagesse Playing Field is the first playing field in the country where you can play cricket at night. I didn't hear the Member who is a resident of St. David speak about that, you know. But there's an effort to light the cricket stadium, but coincidentally, Madam President, there were table knocks about lighting the cricket stadium, but when the Government had an opportunity to bring cricket to Grenada, they failed to invest in bringing cricket to Grenada. **(Applause)** They failed. The cricket was right in St. Vincent. I mean, we have a state-of-the-art cricket stadium, and you did not bring a cricket game to Grenada.

Madam President, from reports, support and investment in cricket in this country is at its lowest. It's at its lowest. So, I don't know what all the excitement is about lighting the playing field, the stadium, or the cricket stadium, when your actions are not in line with such, Madam President.

You know, Madam President, the Member who was presenting about the lights, you know, in the "Other Place", and he was going down the line of achievements, you know, I laughed. He was using the word "check", "check" and "check", Madam President. I laughed, because I know he's familiar with cheques, you know. I don't know if it's that type of "checks", but I know he's very formula with cheques, maybe the rubbery ones. Madam President, so I found it very, very interesting that he used the word "check", you

know, so I just wanted to raise that. Yes, Madam President.

Madam President, I want to move to Agriculture. Madam President, my colleague is here, and I'm certain that he will have a painful time presenting for Agriculture. You see, he's despondent. Look at him right now, Madam President, and he's not even well. He doesn't even know where to look or what to look at. He isn't saying anything for the farmers. You know, but I just want to say that.

Madam President, it's important to commend the Government in areas where they would have done well, and, of course, in terms of the pay outs, the direct income to farmers and fishermen, I think that was quite in line and very much needed. I think that was a very good initiative to help the farmers.

However, we're probably going to speak more about that when we get to Carriacou and Petite Martinique because it's a totally different picture out there, you know, Madam President. But there are some farmers and fishermen who have indicated or reported that they may have been left out. I hope not intentionally, and so the ministry, I believe, is working to address that.

Madam President, agriculture remains one of our nation's most critical economic assets, of course, and there is a clear lack of vision and leadership in this sector currently. Madam President, I think agriculture is at a critical juncture where there needs to be deep thinking as to how we should shape agriculture and what agriculture should look like going forward in Grenada. I think that is where the conversation should be. As much as the conversation is around vehicles and how to restrict vehicles coming in, Madam President, I think a conversation should be held for agriculture.

And just to go in a little bit on vehicles, Madam President. You know, Grenadians, we love vehicles, and I am not quite certain that restricting them to three years will really alleviate the issue of more vehicles coming in. I'm not quite sure. As we have seen, Madam President, in studies, for example, certain things, certain commodities like alcohol, cigarettes, no matter how much taxes go on them, sales continue to increase, so, Madam President, even if we say no used vehicles coming into Grenada, I'm quite certain that we will find a way to bring in new ones. So, that may not be the issue, the

matter to address, the issue of the congestion of the roads, Madam President, but we may also have to look at the issue of additional roadways, maybe a new highway, a new bridge, whatever the case may be, supplementary roads to help alleviate the traffic. I just raised it for what it's worth, Madam President.

Madam President, I must acknowledge and express support for the Government on the importation of the new breeding stock to help improve livestock production, particularly for Carriacou and Petite Martinique, as livestock production is one of our key pet peeves, Madam President. This is a positive step, but it stands as an exception rather than the rule; the implementation of key projects in the ministry, Madam President, the Ministry of Agriculture, continues to fall below standard.

Madam President, underperformance has become the norm, and this is clearly reflected in the budget execution, for example, Madam President. EC$2 million was allocated to boost the poultry sector. Yet, less than half was spent or invested. At the same time, Madam President, and you see, it's important for us to understand, and maybe to reiterate what Government ought not to be doing. At the same time, Madam President, we've seen excessive spending in excess of EC$8 million in overseas travel for the big leagues and the "sors", Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President, even more alarming, despite the rise in demand for eggs and poultry products, you know that there is a current outbreak of bird flu in some countries. The cost of eggs in the United States is so much now, families are coming out and saying three weeks now… Somebody was interviewed and said, "Three weeks now, I haven't eaten any eggs". So now, they're actually going to the store, and not buying a dozen eggs, but buying two, three, or four eggs. Madam President, that is reality.

So, even with that, Madam President, in some countries, the 2025 Budget for poultry was cut by 50%. That's it. I'm helping my… He is still rummaging through his papers, Madam President. I tell you. I know he has to chew on this. This is a contradiction to what is required, Madam President. Given the global and original food security concerns, I think this needs to be looked into.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Norland Cox

Madam President, cannabis, and I think it's very important that I raise the issue of cannabis, because I can remember in this "Honourable Place", the Leader of Government's Business, he touted they're going to fully legalise, fully legalise, Madam President. Madam President, we've seen a major policy shift, a major policy shift in how this Government plans to treat with the cannabis industry.

Madam President, the NNP Administration was very clear on our position regarding cannabis. We have done our research. We have done our consultations, and one that was aligned with national development priorities, society concerns, and values, Madam President, and after careful deliberation, we chose the part of decriminalisation and not full legalisation, as this current Administration once boasted that it would implement full legalisation of cannabis. Today, Madam President…

Today, however, the NDC Government has followed our approach, opting for decriminalisation rather than full legalisation **(applause)**, and we commend them for seeing the light. We commend them for seeing the light. We welcome the decision as our Administration has always taken steps, Madam President, by introducing necessary legislation. We do have the legislation. It was laid in Parliament and I think it was read a first time, so it's here, Madam President. It's with the Parliament, so we have already made that significant step towards addressing that.

Madam President, the sector. The economic indicators paint a very green picture, Madam President, for agricultural performance. The Central Statistics Office, Madam President, shows that Grenada's food exports in 2024 fell by 37% and we understand some of the impact. Some of the impacts had to do with, of course, natural weather conditions, such as heavy rains and a prolonged drought period, Madam President. So we understand there are some impacts that are contributing towards that. However, it does not take away from the fact that it's an area of major concern.

The Medium-Term Economic Fiscal Strategy Report shows, Madam President, that the average drop in agriculture production is as much as 25%. Madam President, our farmers continue to lose confidence. The farmers across this country contribute to the ministry's ability to deliver. One of the most pressing challenges remains access to

agricultural financing, Madam President. Farmers continue to face hurdles in securing funding from the GDB, only to witness politically connected individuals receiving millions with just a phone call and political leverage, Madam President. **(Applause)** We believe this is unfair. We believe this is unfair.

Madam President, I am very tempted to use some Trump nicknames as we go along, Madam President, but you know, we will probably leave some of that for another time, Madam President. Madam President, the question asked is whether it is fair for our farmers to have such difficulty in being able to access financing for development.

Madam President, the issue of preadial larceny, and my brother here, I know that he doesn't know where to start today. I don't know. Madam President, preadial larceny continues to be a major issue, and I believe that there's a clear opportunity for the Government to do more to support the farmers in this sector.

Madam President, there were numerous discussions around the whole issue of the sargassum seaweed management and Government's failure, Madam President, to spend an allocated EC$600,000 to address this critical issue that was allocated, and not just failed to spend, but, Madam President, ironically we hosted an international symposium on sargassum and we had a funding allocation for sargassum and we didn't spend a cent. But we took the lead. We set ourselves as the leaders, and the issue of sargassum, and we have not done anything, Madam President. **(Applause)**

I know that there were a lot of talks about the nets, trapping the sargassum outside, Madam President. I know also there was another recommendation to use the GRENLEC crane trucks to hold the mango tree, shake the mango tree and collect the mango, and, I mean, o' gosh… Anyhow. Well, Madam President, you know, I say this because sometimes those statements are made, we do not listen and pay attention in terms of the practicality of getting those things done, and it goes back to the word "masquerade", Madam President. However, Madam President, the issue of sargassum still remains a critical issue.

Climate Resilience. Madam President, when it comes to climate resilience, this situation is equally disappointing in terms of performance. Of the EC$4.4 million

budgeted for the climate resident and the agriculture integrated management project, not a single cent was spent.

I remember, Madam President, I stood in this House in 2022, and I said the plan to establish a Ministry of Implementation was not needed. What was required, and I stand today, and I maintain that, Madam President, is a strong department for implementation that can do as good a job or even better than having the expense of a new ministry, Madam President. I stand on that. I stand on that. What is the implementation rate for 2024, Madam President? I think… I think it'd be good for us to know, Madam President.

Despite food security being under serious threat, EC$359,000 was spent of the EC$9.1 million budgeted, Madam President. Those are the numbers. We aren't making them up. Yes. If we make them up, it's because the Ministry of Finance make them up **(applause)**, and if we make an error, it's because it's an error on their part, Madam President.

Madam President, how does the Government justify this level of implementation failure? That is the question. How do you justify that? And my brother, I see him messaging somebody. I think he may be calling out the farmers right now, Madam President. **(Laughter)** He heard this. This is just a snapshot of what is before us, Madam President. Madam President, where is the "Pipeline Ministry"? I don't know. Where is the ministry that is responsible for ensuring these projects are implemented? Where is the ministry? I don't know, Madam President. Failure to implement these critical programmes is both alarming and unacceptable, Madam President. **(Applause)** Unacceptable.

Marketing National Important Board, Madam President, was promised to be fully operational by June 2024; the farmers are still waiting. We understand the intricacies of what is taking place. However, the farmers are very concerned. What is more concerning for farmers is that we heard whether or not this new initiative, which was announced, what was once the Farmers' Depot, meaning the Marketing Board, it's in a short market for most of the produce, is now being repurposed into a private sector entity, and this raises some critical concerns. I think the Government has a responsibility, if you can't do so

during this Sitting, to give some more information so we can ease the concerns of farmers and ease the concerns of my dear brother on "This Side".

As some of those critical questions, Madam President, are how this new company will serve the needs of our farmers. Will the farmers have the same level of access to markets as they did before? What are the safeguards in place to prevent the exploitation of small farmers? Those are some of the pivotal questions that are before us as we move towards this new private sector-led entity. So, Madam President, there are more questions and answers. While farmers continue to struggle with market access and face uncertainty in the future, Madam President, agriculture is the backbone of our economy, but the Government has consistently failed to provide support and leadership that our farmers desperately need. **(Applause)** This cannot continue, Madam President. We need to fix this. We need to fix this.

Madam President, I want to go to Carriacou and Petite Martinique in the context of Beryl, Madam President, because I think the basis for a number of reactions to this budget and how it is constructed is based on the Beryl recovery, Madam President.

Madam President, the Government in its wisdom decided to suspend sections of the FRA, so as not to repay or serve the debt, but it's important for us to let the public know that suspending the debt doesn't mean that it doesn't have to be paid. It will have to be paid at some point in time, Madam President. But what is most contradictory is that the Government took these initiatives to strengthen its hand from a fiscal standpoint, but at the same time, the Government has reinstated VAT on building materials in Carriacou for persons who are still unable to build their roofs. That's a fact.

Go to any of the hardware stores right now, and they will tell you that they were informed that VAT will be reinstituted. So, the measure that the Government currently has in place, where somebody receives EC$15,000 worth of material, Madam President, that is now worth about EC$12,000. Once VAT is applied to it, it would only receive about EC$12,000 plus support; that is, the implications that it has.

So I'm saying this, Madam President, so that by the time Thursday's session is finished, we should hear an announcement that VAT has been removed on building

materials in Carriacou. **(Applause)**

Madam President, the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique continue to persevere and demonstrate resilience in the aftermath of Hurricane Beryl. Madam President, you know, I stand as a Kayak and my connection to the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique, both home and in the diaspora, is deeply rooted. And you know what I love about it, Madam President? It is not rooted in any political preference, but in genuine passion, love, and unwavering commitment to our shared progress, as Kayaks, Madam President. That is the relationship that we have. Madam President, while we have remained strong, the full impact of Hurricane Beryl is only beginning to unfold right now, Madam President.

Our communities, families and loved ones continue to grapple with severe housing challenges, displacement skyrocketing, rebuilding costs, rising food and service prices, water shortages, financial hardships and notably emotional stress, Madam President. I'm highlighting these. Some of these are consistent with a post-disaster, Madam President. So we are no strangers to it, and I'm saying this in the context for the Government to understand and appreciate what is really taking place.

A lot of what is happening, Madam President, and we will dive more into that, is a bit misleading to some extent, Madam President. The impression is given that everything is all good and well in Carriacou, Madam President. We are reopening. We are rebuilding and we're coping, Madam President. Every time somebody comes to Carriacou for the first time, their utterance to me is that, "Cox, you know, I really thought there were more roofs fixed. I didn't realise so many people are in this situation still". **(Applause)** That is the constant utterances, and I'm quite certain there are persons on the "Other Side" who would have heard that themselves, Madam President. That's the fact. And so I say this in the context of when we make statements about our recovery process, we should not mislead people. **(Applause)** We should not mislead people.

What that does, Madam President, is that it creates a hindrance where we could have gotten some support or more support, because if I believe that everything is all good and well with you, I wouldn't look to assist you. Would I? I would not, but if I have an

understanding that you are recovering, you have some challenges, and you need support in several areas, then I can seek to help, but when you give a picture that everything is all good and well, everything is back to normal, then no one will really look to assist you. So, Madam President, I say this in the context that we have to be responsible in our utterances. Madam President, despite those challenges, we continue to adapt to our new reality, demonstrating resilience and hope as we navigate through the slow and sluggish recovery process, Madam President.

But I wish to commend the Government, Madam President, for its support to our students in Carriacou and Petite Martinique in TAMCC, in particular, and some of our secondary school students, and senior citizens in the aftermath of the hurricane, for example, who had to be brought down… Support was given to them, Madam President. This was necessary and needed, and I must commend them for that.

But I have yet, Madam President, and I keep calling for this to see or hear of any concrete plans for the restoration or reconstruction of the TAMCC Carriacou branch, Madam President. The Minister for Education is here; maybe he might have some updates for us on the branch, because I have not seen anything, and I haven't heard any announcement about that. That is a very important institution for our islands, Madam President, and I'm calling to ensure that we get back our TAMCC branch, Madam President.

Education, Madam President, is a foundation of progress. Education is the universal key to coming out of poverty, Madam President. So it is imperative that we restore and enhance that facility, not just to resume operations but to provide a clear opportunity to expand more opportunities, particularly in skill-based training and that will empower more young people in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, Madam President. That is our call. Madam President, I urge the Government to prioritise this crucial, crucial matter. **(Applause)**

Madam President, 14 days after the passage of Hurricane Beryl, this Government benefited from the foresight of the New National Party's Administration **(applause)** in subscribing through the CCRIFT insurance facility, Madam President. EC$180 million.

That is not a small amount of money, Madam President. We cannot trivialise that. That has really given the Government a strong hand for response, Madam President, and we are proud of that. We are proud and pleased that we were able to do so because of our decisions and policies.

Madam President, this is one of the largest and maybe most timely and convenient forms of financial support any government can receive in the aftermath of any disaster. Madam President, however, serious questions remain among the residents of Carriacou and Petite Martinique. A lot of the questions, just to put in local parlance, Madam President, is "Way the money gone?" **(Applause)** That is the question, and I'll expand, Madam President, and we're not implying anything, but I'm only expressing how people feel, Madam President.

They believe that Carriacou and Petite Martinique, as we got the worst set of damages, Madam President, in relation to the amount of money that was collected, their response and support, they believe, do not match, Madam President. That is what they believe, Madam President. That is the feeling, Madam President. While there is a recognition of some achievements, generally the sentiment by persons is one of dissatisfaction, Madam President, and that is what is being said, Madam President. Generally, there is dissatisfaction with the pace and the effect of the recovery efforts. Transparency and accountability in the allocation of these funds must be prioritised to ensure that people who were affected by the disaster receive the support that they need, Madam President.

When it comes to housing support for those affected, Madam President, and I maintain that. It has been ad hoc, and there's a reason for that, Madam President. The ministry, NADMA, or the Government have not at any point in time released any real numbers as to how many homes were destroyed or damaged in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)** To date, we have not heard any real numbers; what we have heard was a guesstimation of about 90% to 95%. There's a clear opportunity, Madam President. With the real numbers, it gives you an opportunity to have a more targeted **(applause)** and specific response, Madam President, and so much so, we are in the age

of technology.

Those homes could have even been georeferenced and tagged with the specific analysis in terms of how many people were in the homes, the damages they had, Madam President, and a like response could have gone easily to those. But the response, I'm telling you, Madam President, unfortunately and sadly, it is going based on how they feel about you, whether or not they believe that they have your support at the next elections, your name will go up at the top of the list. If they believe that they don't have your support, Madam President, your name may come off the list, and if it stays, you will not be treated with. And that is the fact. That is what is happening in Carriacou and Petite Martinique **(applause)**, Madam President, and nobody can tell me otherwise. There are too many reports, Madam President. There's too much evidence to show what is happening, Madam President.

Madam President, the result of guesswork, nepotism and visible political bias in the distribution of assistance in Carricaou. That is what is prevailing, Madam President. That is a characteristic of the Beryl response in Carriacou and Petite Martinique **(applause)**, and that's a fact, that's Madam President, and we have numerous examples, Madam President, numerous examples.

Madam President, when you have over 500 water tanks or black tanks given out to farmers, Madam President, I was an extension officer. It doesn't have 500 registered farmers in Carriacou, Madam President, and you have bona fide farmers up to this date who have not received any support in that regard, all because of perceived political preference. That is embarrassing. That is unfair and that is illegal, Madam President. Because some of those tanks were donated. They were donated. They were donated, and you are the recipient and a medium to facilitate support for people in distress. Madam President, when Beryl passed, the wind and the rain fell on everybody's house top. Each and every one of us, Madam President, and as such, this needs to stop. **(Applause)** It needs to stop, Madam President.

Sometime in September, there was a big announcement about this new type of home, "Build Back" or whatever they call it, Madam President. All right. Build Back Better,

I think that's the name of it. It was promised that 50 homes would be delivered by December 2024. However, Madam President, as of February 2025, I think only three were delivered, but I think sometimes last week, an additional two or so were delivered. But hear the announcement, Madam President. "We have 120 houses either delivered or being built." What is this nonsense about, Madam President? How many houses are completed, and how many do you have waiting to be completed? **(Applause)**

What is all this rigmarole and meandering about? Tell the people how many houses are completed, how many you have building or how many you expect, and the matter is done right there. What is all this meandering about, 120 either finish or hand over? This is nonsense, Madam President. That is pure nonsense. It's just about five houses that were handed over, Madam President, and we haven't got to Petite Martinique yet because I'm dealing with Petite Martinique separately, Madam President.

Madam President, we understand that in any disaster, in any recovery, there are going to be challenges. There are going to be issues because all projects are dynamic. There are things that are out of your control, but if you work based on bias, nepotism, and political favours, you are going to have problems. You are going to have problems, Madam President. You're going to have issues. If you have a plan and a properly coordinated response, where you have all the information and data, and you just put your head down and work, you are going to get results. So this thing about nitpicking; this is rubbish, utter rubbish, Madam President. I'm so disgusted by this. I think this is the most I've ever been emotional about it, because the story is just too much, Madam President.

Madam President, there are persons who never had a house, and they receive a house. We don't have a problem with that, you know, Madam President. I don't have a problem if somebody received a house now and they never had one before, but you have people, you have families that don't have one. They had a house, and they lost it, and either they're staying with someone or they were under a tent, and just because of their political preference, you just ignore it? This is disgusting, Madam President. This is disgusting, for what it's worth.

You know what is even sadder? Somebody stood up and said that this is

leadership. Is that leadership? Is that leadership, Madam President? I don't know. I don't know. I'm very, very, very disturbed about that.

Madam President, the farmers. You know it's… Tell me, Madam President, what could you do with a water tank, more than put it to catch water? What can I do with a water tank, Madam President, more than to put it to catch water; either to shower, to cook or to feed yourself? So what is this thing about denying persons an opportunity to receive a catchment? Carriacou is devastated, so many roofs are gone; what is this thing? What is a black tank? I don't understand. I don't understand. People have to be calling, going backwards and forward.

Madam President, this really needs to be looked into, and maybe that is the reason why we probably had a change in Permanent Secretary. I don't know, maybe the Leader of Government's Business might speak to why there was a sudden shift in the senior public servant in Carriacou, maybe, I don't know. I'm just guessing, Madam President.

Madam President, if this is what you call great leadership, then Carriacou and Petite Martinique are in a lot of trouble. **(Applause)** A lot of trouble. The question is, leadership for whom? I don't know. It cannot be for all, Madam President.

Madam President, numerous bona fide fishermen, whose registered fishing boats, decked out fishing boats, registered fishing boats were damaged and destroyed. They were denied. Their names were removed from the list, and that's a fact, Madam President. Their names were removed from the list; bona fide fishing boat owners. Why do we have to do that? Yes? Why do we have to do that? I don't get it. I don't get it. Yet, there are a number of bona fide fishermen who have not received support and assistance. I understand that efforts are being made to remediate that, so let's hope that the fishermen get the support that they greatly deserve.

Yet, for all Madam President, they stand up and they say, "Look at leadership. Great leadership". Madam President, I don't know. I don't know, but let's go ahead. Let's go ahead. Let me… It's a new crisis that started after Beryl, Madam President. It's another crisis, an internal crisis, a human crisis, Madam President. **(Applause)** Let us go ahead, Madam President. I'll go ahead.

Madam President, additionally, despite repeated advice against using our playing fields to dump the debris as debris sites, this warning was ignored, ignored, Madam President. I could see, when he was done in the first field, fine, you could've gotten away with that; and after the calls, not to use the playing fields, well, who told you to say that? Now, they've started to use the playing fields; one after the next, they just kept dumping in the playing fields. Madam President, as a result, our playing fields remain unusable and may stay that way for a while.

Even after relocating some of the debris, Madam President, I just want to say that there is only one playing field, which is the Mini Stadium, which really escaped the rot of the debris. The reason they escaped is that the Samaritan's Purse Field Hospital was set up at the entrance of the stadium. That is the only reason why. That's the only reason why that field got away. Trust me, Madam President, when I tell you that.

Madam President, even after relocating some of the debris to Harvey Vale, which has now become the main dumping site, the situation remains critical. You know, I heard that they were talking about we're not talking about the garbage anymore. Madam President, people are getting tired. People are getting tired because if I talk to you once, twice, three times, any time you hear I'm not talking again is because I'm done talking. It's because I'm fed up, Madam President. It doesn't mean I'm happy. It is just because I'm fed up.

Madam President, and we heard a lot about "nine months". "In nine months, so much has happened. In nine months, 98% of Carriacou was cleaned up. Madam President, I think the best use of those two thematic numbers, nine months and 98%, is to describe it by saying, Madam President, that's a fact, after nine months, 98% of all the debris is still on the island. **(Applause)** And that's a fact. All the debris is still on the island, after nine months! So, nine months and 98%. 98% of all the debris is in both fields, Harvey Vale and Hillsborough Playing Field. So, Madam President, we like nine months and 98% so let them figure it out. Anyhow, that is great leadership, Madam President. Great leadership. Yes, that's what great leadership looks like.

Madam President, you know, I recall that sometime in 2020 or 2021, the former

Parliamentary Representative for Carriacou and Petite Martinique, in her wisdom and judgment, decided to work on a project to restore the Botanical Gardens in Hillsborough. What! Water couldn't wash her, Madam President, is what they didn't say. Water couldn't wash her. Madam President, in 2025, the only place that we have suitable to host cultural events, social events and even natural events, like our independence, is in the same Botanical Gardens. **(Applause)**

The same Botanical Gardens that they ran down and condemned, Madam President. Madam President, I take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Kindra Mathurine-Stewart for her vision and fortitude, and I leave it right there, Madam President.

Unfortunately, Madam President, the development of sports on the island will suffer in the coming years. Unfortunately. Due to the natural disaster, of course, but more so because of poor decision-making and refusal to listen to sound advice, Madam President. Madam President, when leaders fail to listen, the consequences are felt by the people **(applause)**, and that is what is happening. Hard head, Madam President. They are not listening. Madam President, you know, I've deliberated whether or not I should speak about this, you know, long and hard, but I have to. Because you see...

Madam President: Senator Cox, may I interrupt you to remind you that you're nearing your one and a half hours?

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Madam President, could I ask you for…

Madam President: 10?

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: More like 15. Madam President, you know, as NNP, we are accustomed to the number 15… So?

Madam President: (Laughter)

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: I was really leaning to 15, you know.

Madam President: That's why I'm going to… That's why I am going to break it. This is the Parliament. **(Laughter)** You actually have 15 minutes from now if you start.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Right, so I'm guided by that, Madam President.

Madam President: You have five minutes in your time.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Madam President, you know, I fail to understand this unnecessary posturing. Why will somebody come to this Honourable Place and stand up and posture about having one CXC subject? I don't know, I don't know. Madam President, I was dumbfounded.

Madam President, if somebody has a situation academically and it's hurting you, it concerns you; do something about it. Why are you coming here and trying to justify having one subject? Madam President, every parent wants the best for their children, every parent. As a matter of fact, the people around want nine and 10 subjects for their children, so I am just giving you some words of advice, Madam President. Do something with it. Don't come inside here and try to justify having one subject. Cut that out. That is nonsense, Madam President. I don't just subscribe to those kinds of things. Madam President…

Madam President: Senator Cox, what does that have to do with the budget?

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Madam President?

Madam President: The one subject.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: I am going to explain to you, a point has been made…

Madam President: Connect it…

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: … that because…

Madam President: … or leave it alone.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Yes. No, no. Madam President, you want clarity? I'm happy to go further…

Madam President: Connect it or leave it alone.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: I'm connecting it because, Madam President, the point was made about being a great leader, all right, and meaning that having one subject is great leadership, and they have one subject, that is… That is what… That is the connection, Madam President, within the context of perceived achievement, Madam President, and I'm saying that is not the case.

And you know, Madam President, as you said that, and while we had the discussions around a greater relationship with Africa, Madam President, I think it's important that I leave an African proverb. If I could recall, I think that it is most important for everybody, Madam President. An African proverb says, Madam President, 'Unlike the brain, the stomach alerts you when it's empty", Madam President, and I rest my case.

Madam President, we're moving to Petite Martinique, Madam President. Madam President, you know, I still have to speak a little bit on Beryl because I can't let… There's another Member who embarrassingly tried to make us, the New National Party's response, in terms of cooking a hot meal and providing washroom facilities during a disaster… You tried to make it look like that's the worst thing we can ever do, Madam

President. It's so embarrassing.

Tell me what is wrong with a hot meal, Madam President, after a hurricane? Tell me what is wrong with providing washroom facilities for persons who don't have a home, Madam President? What is wrong with that, Madam President? But yet for all, they're praising other institutions that were cooking meals; the meals had to come all the way from Grenada, Madam President. There were reports… There are reports of persons getting ill. Remember, the food that was prepared came up on a boat, and by the time they were distributed, Madam President, hours had passed, and we are talking about… We had a hot meal programme, Madam President, delivering food, straight off the pot, boiling hot. All of a sudden, there's an issue with that, Madam President. Now I understand why his seat in the Cabinet became vacant, Madam President.

Madam President, you see, people talk about leadership, but you have to know what you're talking about, Madam President. You have to know what you're talking about, and this is crazy. Next thing, Madam President, a lie. I want to dispel this lie. You know, the said gentleman said that, he met me and he asked me to give him some names. That is a lie. That is a lie. The gentleman met me on two matters. He said to me, "Cox, some people were trying to get in touch with you for a star link". I just laughed because he knew he had collected the star link already, and I didn't say anything because I knew that they had communication challenges, so I didn't really bother. It was not issued because it's for Carriacou, so I didn't make an issue, but he came to me as if he didn't know about the item. Why are you doing that? I just laughed, you know, the usual, we have to smile, and I just brushed it aside.

He said to me that he was appointed to lead the cleanup, and he's preparing a letter to send to the Leader of the Opposition so that we can appoint somebody to work along with them. That is what he said to me, up to this day, a letter never came. So when you come inside this House, don't come and make up lies on me because it might just force me to give him a Trump nickname, you understand? I will just… I'm telling you, Madam President, I'm trying to restrain myself. I'm really trying to restrain myself because I can't deal with those things.

Madam President: Please try hard because… **(Laughter)** And this is not happening in this House, by the way, so please.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Madam President, Petite Martinique. Madam President, Petite Martinique has received the worst of Beryl. The worst, Madam President. It's very disheartening, Madam President, when you hear the stories, when you hear the stories, Madam President, up to this day, after nine months, Madam President, not a single home delivered to any Petite Martiniquians. Not one, and that's a fact. Twenty-seven prefab homes came, Madam President. There's a clear opportunity for Petite Martinique to benefit, and they didn't for whatever reason, I don't know, Madam President.

Madam President, the people of Petite Martinique keep calling about the issue of the jetty in the Windward. After nine months, all they are asking for is a temporary jetty. Yes, you have plans to build a new one, but they are significantly inconvenienced. Madam President, when I'm passing, sometimes, elderly people are in little speedboats on the shore, trying to get out, and it's just not making sense, Madam President. We have to fix this. **(Applause)** The ply is there, and all you have to do is just run some lumber on that and do a temporary jetty. What is this? What is it about?

Madam President, the health centre in Petite Martinique. There's a lone health centre in Petite Martinique. Madam President, why are efforts not being made to address it? We are fixing about two or three in Carriacou; Petite Martinique only have one; Carriacou have the hospital operational. It has the Hillsborough Centre operational, so Carriacou is not without service, but yet, for all, you're still leaving out Petite Martinique. **(Applause)** Why? That's the question, why?

Madam President, on any given day it has rough seas, boats have difficulties docking in town; difficulties docking in town, which means that persons can't go into Hillsborough, you may have to go all the way to Harvey Vale, but we know that is the next best safest port, and so I don't understand why attention is not being done to just put a temporary jetty because the new one is going to take time to do. You expect the people

of Petite Martinique to wait for another nine months? Madam President, I think this is unacceptable.

Madam President, you know, talk about leadership, leadership. We're in the dry season, Madam President, we're in the dry season… Just let me know when I have five more minutes, please. Thanks. We're in the dry season, and houses are damaged. We came from a significant dry period, Madam President. I haven't heard a single plan to address this water crisis that is facing us in Carriacou. **(Applause)** Not a single. If you say you're leading and you're a leader, the single most important issue affecting Carriacouans right now is water, and you have not raised it. You raised your subject, and you're talking about being a leader. What leader? I don't understand.

The people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique gave you a chance. They gave you an opportunity despite your shortcomings. Why don't you treat them better? All they're asking for is decency and fairness. That's all. We are very simple and easy people; very simple and easy-going because we understand our mentality, cacabawee for cacabawee.

You cannot, Madam President, you cannot tell me that you have a situation where you have a serious water crisis, a serious water crisis in front of us. The NAWASA plant is going to be under heavy pressure. The main pump just blew. They just procured a new one, I believe, or parts to repair it, and it's going to be under more pressure as the dry season kicks in, and we haven't heard any plans to address that.

It is highly likely, Madam President, that we may have to barge water into Carriacou. It has happened in the past, and there's a strong possibility that it may have to happen again because it's getting serious. It is serious, and so that is where leadership should lie; it should focus on the issues affecting people.

Yes, you put back some roof and some Government buildings, that's fine, that's all good and well, you're getting the government service up and running, but what about the people, Madam President? They are the ones that are hurting, Madam President. So I raised this, Madam President, because I just want to single out, you know, because I had to help the Member understand what true leadership is about.

We hear this, Madam President, the Samaritan's Purse came in with three portable

desalination units. When they were leaving, they gifted the three units to the Government of Grenada. What did we do? We refused them. We refused them. Some… I don't know. One day, someone called me, but I didn't know who he was. I think he was handling the shipping back of the equipment, and he called me, Madam President. I don't even know his name, begging me to find a way to intervene so that the units can stay on the island. You know where the units ended up, Madam President? The Honourable Ralph Gonzalez welcomed them in Union Island. Yes, they welcomed them there. We refuse them. Madam President, is that leadership? Is that great leadership? If that's leadership, well, we are in a lot of trouble. "Crapo smoke we pipe", Madam President.

Madam President: You're in a lot of trouble…

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: We're already in trouble, Madam President.

Madam President: … with your time, you have about five minutes.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: No, Madam President. You know, I told you I have a great affinity for 15. But, nonetheless, Madam President, let me just close by saying this. You know, I just want to express gratitude to all the institutions and agencies that came to our aid after Beryl, and that just goes without saying. I'm quite certain that every Carriacouan and Petite Martiniquian is very happy for the support, but I think our food programme is still on the island, and so we're very, very grateful for that, Madam President.

I, too, want to thank my party for giving me the opportunity to continue to do the work that is necessary, and, of course, to be in the space where I live and thrive, Madam President, to do the work to help our people through this difficult time. Madam President, I want to thank my family and my kids. I'm still trying to figure out how I'm doing this, you know, as a single parent right now.

I see my colleague laughing. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Well, I did

thank the Government, Madam President, on several instances, **(laughter)** the Hansard can bear that, Madam President. The Government has a responsibility, yes, and so I'm looking more at the people who came from outside to help us.

So, Madam President, it's within this, you know, I just want to thank my family, friends, and, of course, the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique for affording me an opportunity to interact with them on a daily basis, to ensure that we bring a better outlook than what we have here now, a better outlook.

I just want to close by saying, Madam President, through you, I don't know how you'll get the information across, but please tell the gentleman to stop that. Stop that. He needs to behave better. He has to treat our people better. He has to be fair to Carriacouans and Petite Martiniquians. Cut out this arrogance, Madam President. You know, I just want to close on that because I don't know how people take joy in cursing the police. Thank you very much, Madam President. I closed.

Madam President: Thank you very much, Senator Cox. Thank you. I will not take the job of messenger to Carriacou or anywhere else, but I did hear you make some recommendations, and some requests for information, and I'm sure the "Other Side" was listening.

Thank you for coming, Madam. Thank you very much for being with us. The Leader of the Opposition has visited us. It's slightly after one; we are trying very hard to stay on schedule, so we'll suspend the Senate Debate on the Estimates for a very tight hour. If the Leader of Government's Business agrees, we will break, lunch and return. We'll start at two, so please assemble a little bit before two, so we can start at two. I thank you very much.

Senate adjourned for lunch at 1:01 p.m.

Senate resumed at 2:05 p.m.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Gloria Thomas

Madam President: I trust all enjoyed lunch, and now the debate on the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures, from the Government of Grenada for 2025, resumes. The floor has been requested, and I offer it to Senator Gloria Thomas.

Sen. the Hon. Gloria Thomas: Thank you, Madam President. I rise to give my full support to the 2025 Budget of Income and Expenditure as presented by the Minister for Finance, MP for St. Patrick East, under the theme, "Towards Vision 75: Grenada—Resilient and Rising", a theme that was carefully chosen to steer the development of the country as we move forward.

Pleasant, good afternoon to all Members of this House. I trust you had a very good lunch. Good afternoon to all listeners here in the State of Grenada and in the diaspora, pleasant, good afternoon to members in the Gallery. Let me take this opportunity to thank God for his continued guidance, mercy, and protection as I continue to serve in the Ministry of Social and Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs.

I also want to extend my gratitude to the Honourable Prime Minister for having faith in me to afford me the opportunity to continue to provide leadership to this very important ministry. Let me take the opportunity to thank MP Delma for agreeing to join the Government of Grenada and for working along with me to serve the people of this country. **(Applause)** To the people from the big parish, who are in the Gallery attending this session, especially those from St. Andrew North West, I admire your commitment to the cause of the development of this country. **(Applause)**

To my permanent secretaries and staff of the ministry, who have worked so hard to assist in ensuring that the agenda of the ministry is fulfilled, I express my thanks to you all. Let me take this opportunity to wish all social workers within the Ministry of Social and Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs, a happy Social Workers Day as we celebrate today under the theme, "Strengthening Intergenerational Solidarity for Enduring Wellbeing". I encourage you, as social workers, to continue making a difference in the lives of the people whom you serve. Thank you for your service.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Gloria Thomas

Madam President, last year, the Ministry of Social and Community Development was allocated an amount of EC$41 million to provide services to the people of the tri-island state, and they were adequately serviced as far as the resources allowed. This year's budgetary allocation has seen an increase, and this will certainly allow for greater service to the people of Grenada.

In reflecting on the achievements of the ministry, so much has been done. We have exceeded expectations in many areas, and we still have a lot to do. We can safely say the Ministry of Social and Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs, is one of the most active ministries in the Government of Grenada, meeting the needs of the people and the community. We have to continually determine between needs and wants to offer social provision for persons making requests.

Madam President, as we navigate the complexities of the social challenges we are faced with, it is very clear that the Ministry of Social Development is pivotal to addressing these societal challenges. Our aim is to focus on improving the quality of life for our citizens, fostering an inclusive environment and empowering families and individuals to reach their full potential.

Hurricane Beryl Response—Psychosocial Support

Madam President, I give high commendation to first responders for the swift response after Hurricane Beryl. Two days following the passage of the hurricane, the psychosocial team was on the ground providing support to people in shelters and affected communities, which continued for months following the aftermath of the hurricane.

Interventions were conducted with staff of the National Emergency Centre, police officers, nurses, airport staff, elderly homes, emergency shelters, community intervention, direct individual attention and so on. 162 people benefited from group interventions; 43 from individual counselling; and 924 people were reached through community interventions.

The main objective was to provide psychological well-being after Beryl, using various disaster mental health interventions to safeguard against post-disaster mental health issues. The intervention methods used were psychological first aid and trauma-

informed care counselling

World Food Programme grants. The ministry benefited from the Hurricane Beryl relief grant fund from the World Food Programme, which formed part of the ministry's response. The grant received was EC$271,600. It was given to support the immediate Beryl response effort.

Support for Education Empowerment and Development (SEED)

One of the major achievements of the SEED Programme is the roll-out of the Cash Card, which will allow for easier access to funds. Currently, there are 7685 beneficiaries on the programme. All beneficiaries in Carriacou and Petite Martinique received a cash top-up of EC$700 following the passage of Hurricane Beryl, whilst beneficiaries' households in St. John, St. Mark and St. Patrick received an amount of EC$330. This was made possible through funding assisted by the World Food Programme and UNICEF.

Elderly Care and Family Support Response

The Top Hill Elderly Care Home was significantly damaged in the hurricane. As a result, the residents of the home were relocating to the mainland. Subsequently, to their relocation, it was determined that the ministry needed to expand its response to accommodate more of our elderly citizens and vulnerable families.

Early Childhood Support

The ministry partnered with UNICEF to support the Early Childhood Unit in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, which was severely impacted by Hurricane Beryl. A grant of EC$21,360 was given to expand, reach, and impact. A great number of children in need of essential care and support reached age-appropriate education material, such as posters, early childhood development kits, activity books and soft toys, which were distributed to create a stimulating and comforting environment for the children as a coping strategy.

Beryl Relief Income Support Programme (BRISP)

BRISP is managed by the Government of Grenada with support from the World Food Programme. Applications were received from persons affected by Hurricane Beryl

in November 2024. From the parishes of St. Patrick, St. Mark, St. John and St. Andrew, many people came forward, as well as Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

The aim of the programme is to provide income support to households that suffered a loss of income due to the hurricane. In excess of 1200 persons applied for the programme, while a total of 869 were successful. The programme duration is six months, and successful applicants have been receiving their distribution through the parish revenue offices. Payments have been made thus far for January and February. March disbursements, and the remaining months will occur during the last week of each month. Pay out thus far for January and February amounts to EC$1,506,700.

Institutional strengthening policy and legislative agenda

Madam President, my ministry continues to make significant strides in policy development and empowerment projects, projects that build and strengthen our resilience and national development agenda. In 2024, we advanced two major national policies: the National Disability Policy and Action Plan and a new National Population Policy that will lay the foundation for advancing our national inclusivity agenda.

National Disability Policy and Action Plan

The National Disability Policy and Action Plan speaks to the necessity of a comprehensive and inclusive approach to empowerment, addressing barriers across healthcare, education, employment and all the key sectors of society. We must be mindful that true inclusion is not achieved through policies alone, but through sustained action and a collective commitment to removing the barriers.

Access to communal resources and public spaces is a right. We must ensure that physical accessibility is a priority in planning and infrastructural development. We need to emphasise the importance of retrofitting public buildings to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and ensuring that transportation and other public services are equally available to all citizens. Madam President, this is a step in the right direction to realise true inclusivity.

The National Population Policy

Madam President, after recognising that our development plan and agenda are

significantly deficient and operating without an established planning framework, we decided on a population policy in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund. The policy is a structured framework to respond to the emerging demographics and human development realities in Grenada.

This framework emphasises the importance of demographic resilience and enhancing the capacity of the population to adapt to social, economic, and environmental changes, while fostering linkages between set targets and our development outcomes. By prioritising resilience, the framework aims to ensure sustainable progress in human development, even in the face of shifting democratic trends and external pressures.

The ministry successfully completed the development of two important policies designed to enhance our victim response mechanism: the policies on the rights of victims and survivors of gender-based violence in Grenada and the policies to guide the legislative reform on gender-based violence.

The policies on the rights of victims and survivors of gender-based violence in Grenada establish general guiding principles for the law enforcement officers, police officers, of the justice system, the court, health workers and human service workers to inform service delivery to victims and survivors.

The policies to guide legislative reform on gender-based violence strengthen Grenada's policy on legislative framework to effectively address gender-based violence and eliminate systemic gaps that hinder justice for survivors. The policies address systemic gaps related to gender-based and family violence, focusing on legislative reforms in areas such as family law, child protection, non-marital unions, domestic violence, sexual offences, victims' rights and institutional reform. The policies provide guidance on non-legislative matters related to access to justice, addressing the needs of institutions designed to provide essential services, support victims, and hold offenders accountable.

Gender Focal Point

Madam President, through the division of general family affairs, we've successfully formalised a network of gender focal points under the CUSO International Blueprint for

Gender Equality in various ministries. The initiative provided training in gender analysis and result-based management to designate gender focal points. The step, Madam President, has laid the foundation for a more systemic gender mainstreaming approach in all sectors of Government.

The ministry, through the Gender-based Violence Unit, intensified its efforts against domestic and gender-based violence in 2024 through awareness, coordination and support activities. It coordinated Grenada's observance of the 16 Days of Activism campaign with nationwide events, effectively raising public awareness and engaging stakeholders in combating gender-based violence.

Madam President, the unit also strengthened multi-agency coordination by conveying the coordinating mechanisms, stakeholders' consultation and maintaining ongoing Case Management for GBV cases. This collaboration approach aimed to improve how different sectors respond to and prevent violence.

Parenting

Madam President, our parenting programme is essential for equipping our parents with skills and knowledge to foster positive parenting practices. **(Applause)** It also helped to reduce the risk of children being abused and enhanced their well-being. It provides support and a sense of community, helping parents navigate challenges and rebuild stronger family relationships.

Madam President, in this light, the Parenting Unit expanded its Family Outreach Programme and Support Services. **(Applause)** The unit implemented parenting education initiatives, such as the [1]Y-RIE and SPICY Parent Programmes, with the successful completion of three cycles of parenting training during 2024. This programme collectively trained over 900 parents and prospective parents. **(Applause)**

In addition to the training, the unit provided direct support to families in need, which included the distribution of food hampers as part of a parenting support safety net to help vulnerable households. It is said that a hungry man is an angry man, and sometimes

[1] Youth Resilience, Inclusion, and Empowerment

when parents become hungry, the children suffer.

Men Programme

Madam President, the Men's Bureau was established in 2023 as an evolution of the former Men's Desk. The Men's Bureau made notable progress in 2024 by actively involving men and boys in gender equality efforts. **(Applause)** It successfully conducted the Boys-to-Men Mentorship Programme, engaging young men in personal development and positive masculinity training. The year's activity culminated in a graduation ceremony recognising participants' achievements. This programme provided a structured environment for boys to develop life skills and challenge negative gender stereotypes, making a measurable step forward towards gender responsive attitudes among young men.

The Men's Bureau also led a community outreach around International Men's Day, organising engagements and public forums in various communities. These events encourage men's involvement in conversations about fatherhood, mental health and general equality, thereby broadening support for the overall gender agenda. Through such initiatives, the Men's Bureau in 2024 helped to ensure that men and boys are acknowledged as crucial partners in advancing gender equality.

Socially Interventions

Madam President, the Division of Social Services is our main Social Protection Programme delivery machinery. The mandate of the division is to provide services that are geared towards equitable and sustainable improvements in the quality of life of vulnerable people in the State of Grenada.

The focus of the division is to address social protection by providing restorative, rehabilitative and support services to adult offenders and victim services to individuals and families in times of crisis, the implementation of safety net programmes, and services geared towards improving the lives of older persons and services geared towards the early stimulation of infants between the ages of zero and three years.

Madam President, I want to speak a little bit about the Juvenile Justice Programme. In light of the current situation, to our youth, we see the importance of

placing much-needed emphasis on our Juvenile Justice System. Our Juvenile Justice System is crucial for addressing the unique needs of young offenders and the youth-at-risk population by focusing on prevention and rehabilitation. It aims to guide youth towards positive development, reduce recidivism, and support the integration of young offenders who serve custodial sentences. **(Applause)**

Madam President, our Government continues to support juvenile justice institutional strengthening through the provision of critical staff to support this programme agenda, which includes the hiring of two probation officers, who strengthen our capacity to provide case management and individual support for juveniles across different jurisdictions. Additionally, two community reintegration officers were hired to assist with the transition of juveniles back into society post-detention, facilitating smoother reintegration through targeted supports and community-based programmes. The new additions have already been translated into service delivery improvements, particularly in addressing individual needs and achieving better reintegration outcomes.

Madam President, to streamline management and enhance accessibility, the Division of Juvenile Justice undertook the district reassignments of probation officers: District one—St. John and St. Mark, and district two—St. Andrew, St. Patrick and St. David. This reorganisation has allowed officers to better manage their case load geographically, ensuring that juveniles in each area have consistent access to probationary services. This move has also improved our response time, allowing for more efficient monitoring and support.

The Juvenile Justice Technical Advisory Committee was established in 2024. This committee was established to ensure that inter-agency collaboration becomes a reality. Interagency collaboration is pivotal in addressing the complexities of juvenile justice by focusing on policy programme monitoring, enhancing service coordination and cooperation by fostering communication across agencies. Thus far, significant progress has been made in ensuring a cohesive approach to juvenile justice and establishing a coherent mechanism for improvement in service delivery.

The Natural Harnessing Young Potential Excellence (HYPE) Mentoring

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Gloria Thomas

Programme

A milestone achievement was the launch and implementation of the cabinet-approved Natural Harnessing Young Potential Excellence Juvenile Programme. The HYPE Programme is designed to address juvenile delinquency through mentorship and positive remodelling, building resilience, developing life skills and creating supportive networks for at-risk youth. The programme aligns with our commitment to providing alternative pathways for youth, particularly those on the boundaries of the justice system. The main objective of the programme is to steer them away from delinquency and towards a trajectory of positive personal development.

Training, Consultation and Public Engagements

Madam President, the Ministry of Social and Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs, recognises the importance of training, retraining and upscaling of staff to ensure that staff members remain relevant and adaptable to changing job realities. And so, Madam President, a number of training, consultations and public engagements were undertaken. This, Madam President, is the essence of our efficient service delivery at the ministry, and I have about three pages of trading that we do, but that can always be accessed.

Community Development

Madam President, in 2024, the Department of Community Development sought to revamp community development to reflect a lessening of focus on concrete projects and an increased focus on softer aspects of community development, for example, soft skills and vocational training. An area of interest for us is community education in areas of financial management, priority setting and decision making.

Madam President, those areas, if executed carefully, can solve a lot of our problems in this island. In keeping with its mandate, community development assisted in the formation and resuscitation of over 100 small businesses throughout the country. These included businesses in Agriculture, Landscaping, Mechanical Engineering and Information Technology, to name a few.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Gloria Thomas

Madam President, a fashion design programme at Marlmount Community Centre, St. David, was conducted. Electrical Installation Programme at La Fillette School, St. Andrew North West was done. Introductory Plumbing Training in collaboration with GRENCASE at River Sallee Community Centre, St. Patrick, was done.

In the area of sports development, upgrades are done to several playing fields with the construction of toilet facilities and the provision of right lighting. **(Applause)** These include:

- La Mode Playing Field, St. George North East;
- Mirabeau Playing Field, St. Andrew North West;
- La. Borie Playing field, St. George South East;
- Munich Playing Field, St. Andrew South West;
- Alston George Park Pavilion, St. Mark;
- River Salle Playing Field (bleachers covering), St. Patrick East; and
- Crochu Primary School Playing Field. **(Applause)**

The Division of Community Development is pleased to report that it was responsible for introducing solar street lights to the "Big Parish". **(Applause)** Today, this is a common feature around the island as we now move towards environmental sustainability and reducing carbon footprints. Madam President, utilising solar energy, which is clean, renewable energy, is the way to go. **(Applause)**

Madam President, for many years, our community centres, which are at the heart of community development, have been neglected and have fallen into a state of disrepair. Madam President, hear this. In some cases, these vital spaces were repurposed for uses far removed from their intended purposes, including as private residences, businesses, churches and even storage facilities, as the then-Government failed to provide housing facilities for people needing same. Madam President, we therefore must address this abnormality so that community centres can be of benefit for the entire community and not just for one individual and their family. **(Applause)**

The Ministry of Community Development has been committed to restoring these community centres to their rightful role within our communities. To this end, in 2024,

significant renovation works have been undertaken at many of the centres across the island.

Furthermore, Madam President, we have established management committees to oversee the operation of these centres, ensuring that they function independently of the ministry, with local leadership guiding their activities. To make these centres easily identifiable and to create a sense of unity, all refurbished centres have been painted in a distinctive standard blue colour. **(Applause)** No green. No yellow. Madam President, this initiative is part of our broader vision to reinstate community centres as hubs for social, cultural, educational and recreational activities. **(Applause)**

Some of the community centres, which were renovated, include Corinth, Vincennes, Berrotte, Old Westerhall, Belle Isle, St. David **(applause)**, La Poterie, Upper St. John Community Centre, and River Sallee Community Centre. The electrical works were done on the Union Community Centre in St. Mark, Mamma Cannes, and Crochu Community Centres, Chantimelle Community Centre, Happy Hill Community Centre, SABB Wellness and Resource Community Centre, with ongoing works.

Madam President, in this budgetary year, we will continue to invest heavily in our community centres. In 2025, we will ensure that they are maintained and utilised for the intended purpose, contributing to the growth and development of our nation.

In the areas of community self-help, the ministry funded and implemented approximately 100 small projects throughout Grenada. These include the construction of bus sheds, byroads, foot path, slipper drain, box drains, retaining wall, toilet facilities, change room and installation of solar-powered street lights.

Madam President, in line with the Government's ongoing commitment to our public service, the Ministry of Community Development is taking significant strides towards digitising its operations. As part of this initiative, we are transitioning from a dominantly paper-based workforce to a fully digital system. This transformation is aligned with the Government's mandate to reduce paper usage and enhance operational efficiency.

Department of Housing

Under the Ministry of Housing, Home Improvement and Resilience Programme, a

total of 454 houses were repaired on the mainland. Additionally, 295 bathrooms were constructed, while 242 new houses were built, and many families received housing material assistance. It is important to note that all new houses constructed include the construction of bathroom and toilet facilities as Government pressed on with its mandate to end the use of pit latrines by 2027. **(Applause)** Under MIT, an additional 210 homes were repaired, and 144 were built. This was to complement the housing provision to help address the dire need for housing in the country. When we took office, Housing was in a real, terrible state. We worked hard in 2024 to improve housing, but there is much more to be done.

Madam President, the Ministry of Housing held three training workshops with builders and contractors to ensure that all builders and contractors understood and complied with national building codes standards, regulations, and safety standards and that they're up to date with the latest construction techniques, material technologies and sustainable practices. This was done to help maintain consistency and quality across the housing projects.

Madam President, I would like to briefly turn my attention to the Housing Authority of Grenada. The Housing Authority of Grenada has accomplished several significant achievements over the past year. Notably, repairs were carried out at the Chinese Low-Income Housing Scheme in Frequente, Mt. Gay and Soubise. These repairs included, but were not limited to, replacement of railings, balusters, electrical upgrades, plumbing upgrades and roof repairs. In 2025, it is anticipated that work will continue on these developments.

In phase two of the Chinese Low-Income Housing Scheme, homes were distributed at the facilities in Corinth, Beausejour, The Villa and Dumfries. To date, approximately 180 units are occupied, and this number is steadily increasing. Through its Residential Home Construction Arm, the authority completed and delivered numerous homes to Grenadian families, approximately EC$1.5 million in total. As part of its mandate and through the Government of Grenada, the authority approved a total of EC$2.99 million to soft loan clients. In 2024, the authority also launched the much-

anticipated and talked-about Project 500 at Dunfermline, St. Andrew.

Madam President, as I speak, phase one of the project is fully underway, and 17 show houses are presently being constructed using different methods and techniques. Upon completion, phase two of the project will begin later this year with the infrastructure development of roads and utilities. And, Madam President, let me add, the delay in the project has nothing to do with the Government's inefficiency or the Housing Authority's inefficiency. We had some problems getting the materials to Grenada, so that was one of the problems with the delay on that project.

This site can boast of dedicated green spaces, relaxing lot sizes, reasonable covenants to ensure standards are maintained, as well as public recreational parks, along with other amenities. Once fully built, over 90 houses will be constructed in that location. The Government of Grenada's investment in Project 500 to date is valued at EC$9 million. During the campaign, we said we were going to address the housing shortage in Grenada. Madam President, we do not make idle promises. **(Applause)**

National Insurance Scheme

Madam President, I want to briefly report on the National Insurance Scheme, which falls under my purview. After years of neglect, it was this Government that took the bold step to ensure that the National Insurance Scheme remained a sustainable and viable entity for our pensioners **(applause)**, our children and grandchildren by enacting a series of much-needed parametric changes. These changes, of course, were the recommendation of the actuary as provided in section 22 of the National Insurance Act. Therefore, in 2024, as we began to ensure that all Generations can benefit from the NIS and the numerous benefits and pensions that it offers, the following changes took effect.

1. The pensionable age has increased from 60 to 61 years.
2. The contribution rate has increased from 12% to 12.5%
3. The minimum pension for survivors benefit increased by 25%.

The ceiling on which NIS pension is payable also increased, ensuring that pensions and other benefits increase are more in line with actual wages. Madam President, you may recall that in 2023, Grenada became the third country in the English-

speaking Caribbean to offer unemployment benefits to its citizens. Numerous persons are benefiting from this, including our brothers and sisters in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, who suffered under the ravages of Hurricane Beryl.

In this instance, the Government did not have to go begging in the NIS to see how it could assist the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique; instead, they were entitled **(applause)**, and these benefits which they receive were much more in compensation compared to when assistance was simply requested. I call this visionary leadership. **(Applause)**

Madam President, the financial performance of the NIS underscores the organisation's dedication to prudent management towards forward thinking and fiscal sustainability. As of December 31, 2024, the National Insurance Scheme reserve total stood at EC$1 billion. In 2024, the NIS paid out a total of EC$125 million in benefits to the people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Key priorities for 2025

Madam President, to ensure that our policy documents and planning framework evolve into tangible action in 2025, our focus will be on the implementation of a new, inclusive policy. We will also focus on operationalising the National Gender Equality Commission, which is a new oversight body to monitor the implementation of the National Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan, and to guide national responsive policy-making. Alongside our policy implementation agenda, the ministry will continue to make advancements through the implementation of existing projects. This includes the next phase of the blueprint for gender equality and building back equal initiative to further women's economic empowerment and community-level gender inclusion. We will continue to strengthen partnerships with civil society and increase grassroots participation to amplify impact and inspire project reach.

Gender Base Violence

In the coming year, the Gender Based Unit will focus on strengthening the national framework for GBV response and prevention. A cornerstone of this effort is to develop and put into operation a national gender-based strategic action plan providing a

coordinated road map for addressing gender-based violence across all sectors. Along with strategic planning, the unit plans to establish and monitor enhanced GBV response mechanisms on the national level. For example, we'll be formalising the interagency protocols and taskforce so that police, healthcare workers, shelters and community organisations can respond swiftly and effectively to incidents of GBV.

The unit will also continue to grow its empowerment and support programme for gender-based violence survivors, offering resources like counselling, economic empowerment initiatives and emergency assistance to help survivors rebuild their lives. Public education and prevention will also remain central, with plans to scale up the community-based education programme to address the root causes of violence. By the end of 2025, the GBV unit aims to have a stronger national strategy in place. **(Applause)** We're also hoping to have a more robust coordination among stakeholders and an enhanced support system for those affected by GBV.

Men Programming

In 2025, the Men's Bureau plan to expand its outreach and programming for male engagement. Building on the Boys-to-Men initiative, it will introduce broader programmes in more communities and address a wider range of issues affecting men, including topics like mental health and economic participation, to promote positive masculinity holistically. The aim is to reach a more diverse group of men, youth in school, fathers in the community, and men in workplaces, and involve them in initiatives that foster a respectful attitude and constructive life skills.

Another priority is to evaluate and refine the impact of these programmes. The Bureau intends to conduct a systematic impact assessment and follow up with participants to measure long-term outcomes, such as changes in attitudes or behaviours, and use this feedback to improve programme design. This will facilitate the scaling up of the activities and ensure that they are evidence-based. The Bureau will contribute to a more inclusive national dialogue on gender and help solidify gains in men's support for gender equality in 2025 and beyond.

Gender Focal Points

In 2025, capacity building will also continue, with more training slated for gender focal points across ministries and for community partners, ensuring that a wide range of stakeholders have the skills to apply gender analysis and support the ministry's mission. Additionally, the ministry will seek to broaden its partnership network in 2025 and engage not only international agencies but also local civil society and private sector actors in joint initiatives. These partnerships can bring in additional resources and innovative approaches, whether it's business supporting women, entrepreneurship for NGO's, facility outreach in remote areas and so on.

Parenting

Building on its 2024 momentum, the Parenting Unit aims to scale up the Parenting Programme to reach even more families nationwide, including those in rural or underserved areas. This will involve broadening the SPICY initiative to ensure wider engagement of parents and caregivers. Madam President, the ministry plans to work towards a support group of parents for parents, where their successes in parenting can be shared, as well as the challenges, to provide encouragement and hope to each other.

Madam President, another priority is to advocate for stronger family-friendly policies, such as improving family leave provisions and social protection measures, to create a more supportive environment for parents and children. By reinforcing the policy framework and expanding programme reach, it will further strengthen family networks and positive parenting practices in 2025.

Madam President, we will continue to expand the reach of the programme because I am cognisant of the fact that this programme plays a vital role in equipping parents with knowledge and resources, therefore contributing to promoting healthier, more resilient families, communities and by extension, a better Grenada.

Adult Probation

Madam President, the 2025 plan for the Adult Probation Unit includes developing a standard operating procedure for the unit, developing and implementing programmes to meet the needs of adult offenders, and providing a reintegration programme for non-violent, low-risk offenders to prepare them for reintegration into the community after they

are released from prison, expanding the unit service to include the Magistrate's Court of Grenada and conducting a review of the Probation Act, which was in place since 1960, and require amendments to bring it in line with the present probation sector in Grenada.

Juvenile Justice

In 2025, the Juvenile Justice Division will review the draft of the Juvenile Justice Policy, make amendments to the Juvenile Justice Act, implement the Aggressive Replacement Training Programme for young offenders and youth-at-risk, and implement the Restorative Community Service Programme. The focus of the programme is to help offenders understand the impact of their actions and provide them with a supportive mechanism to change their behaviour.

The division will also develop, design and implement a Juvenile Justice Management Information System, establish a protocol between the police and the Juvenile Justice Division for the communication of arrest of juveniles to facilitate proper intervention and case management approaches, and develop a protocol for the assessment of children who have been arrested. This protocol will be used by probation officers as part of the intervention approach.

In 2025, work recommenced on the construction of the Transition Units for our young people exiting the care homes. These units will provide a halfway house for young people for a two-year period, where training opportunities will be provided. Mentorship, apprenticeship, career counselling and skills needed to allow them to be independent and productive citizen. **(Applause)**

So, Madam President, as you realise, the Ministry of Social and Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs is a broad-based ministry, spanning a lot of work and a lot of areas. For many people, they think Social Development is SEED, and when you don't get SEED, nothing happens in Social Development. But I think with this presentation here, people have a better appreciation of the vastness of the work that we do in Social Development. **(Applause)**

In conclusion, Madam President, as I close, let us remember that as we continue our journey in 2025, let us remember that Social Development is not merely a goal to be

achieved but a continuous process that requires our commitment, creativity and collaboration. Together, we can pave the way for a future where every person has the opportunity to thrive, where diversity is celebrated, and where human rights and social justice are not just an aspiration, but a reality. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Thomas. It's been a genuine tour across the ministry with quite a number of activities for 24 and a vision for 25. I noticed, if I read the budget proposal correctly, including Infrastructure and Other Capital Investment as well as Recurrent Expenditure, you probably have over EC$110 million in your hands to give to the people of Grenada for their productive, resilient, sustainable social development. So, I wish you good luck in having the budget passed and implementing that. Thank you for your presentation. I offer the floor to the "Other Side", and with pleasure, I call…

Sen. the Hon. Salim Rahaman: Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: Thank you to all of those who are leaving. Thank you for being with us in Social Development. Continue your good work. Thank you. I notice lots and lots of women in Social Development. Keep up the good work, and keep supporting your minister. Thank you. Senator Salim Rahaman, the Representative in the Senate for the Business Sector, thank you, sir.

Sen. the Hon. Salim Rahaman: Thank you, Madam President. Good afternoon to you, my fellow colleagues, staff of Parliament, guests here today, businessmen and businesswomen, fellow Grenadians listening at home and abroad. I begin in the name of God Almighty, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Whoever God Almighty guide aright, there is none who can misguide, and whoever God Almighty leaves the stray, there is none who can guide aright. It is his will that must come to pass. It is his will that we have seen

consistent economic growth over the years. **(Applause)** And, it is his will that we have this Government holding the reins at this point in time. **(Applause)** **"**Blessed is He in Whose hand is the dominion, and He has power over all things". That is taken from the Quran chapter 67 verse 1.

This morning I stand before you, not just as a businessman, but as a stakeholder, a citizen of our country, one who represents the interests of the private sector, the engine of growth; a sector that creates employment, a sector that drives innovation and trends, a sector that fuels growth. Businesses require an enabling environment, one geared towards growth and development. We require an understanding and responsive government working together with us for the benefit of all of us. Madam President, we believe this budget attempts to do that.

For example, the business community has lamented over the lack of skilled workers in Grenada, and what do we see? We see catered for in this 2025 Budget, a strong focus on education and re-education. **(Applause)** TVET Centres of Excellence to boost our skills training, which is so desperately needed, free tuition for TAMCC students, free tuition for NEWLO students and the intention to move toward the goal that from every Grenadian home, a university graduate will come. **(Applause)** These are noble goals that the business community is happy to support. Madam President, if you want to transform a nation, transform the minds of the people of the nation, as said, the business community welcomes these initiatives.

Only a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister, along with the Minister for Economic Affairs, met with members of the business community over lunch. They came upon an invitation from the Grenada Chamber of Industry and Commerce. The Prime Minister encourage greater involvement from the private sector in the affairs of this country.

He was very open with us about his thoughts, ranging from rethinking our education system to the economy, and we were also very candid with him about our thoughts. The exchange was a very beneficial one. Building and maintaining relationships with those who pay a considerable amount of taxes is also very important, Madam President. A commitment was given by the Prime Minister to meet with the

business community more often to ensure that we all have an opportunity to contribute adequately to our nation's development.

Madam President, as a businessman, I am on the ground often. Last week… And I can't make this up even if I tried. There is a small contractor who is a customer of mine. In chatting with him, he said, and I had to laugh because he caught me off guard. He said, "Under this Government, all dogs, cats, goat and sheep are getting a chance to work". **(Applause)** He said, "Road work is not only happening close to carnival and Christmas, but it is going on right through the year". **(Applause)**

Madam President, I have known this guy as a contractor for about 10 years. He is a good builder, but he only registered his business last year. Do you know why? He didn't understand the system, and he didn't know how it could be a benefit to him, so he came and told me that when he registered his business, he hoped he had done a good thing. Some months ago, he attended a workshop held for contractors, and that was all he needed to get his business going. **(Applause)** Madam President, I said this to say that opportunity is reaching some people in a way that it never reached before. **(Applause)**

Madam President, the recently presented Budget for 2025 reflects a commendable effort by the Government to provide liquidity that the nation needs at this time to continue to grow the economy, and to navigate post-Beryl in an ever-changing and challenging global environment. Let's get some of the numbers to assess the budget from a business perspective, looking at areas of strength and those of concern to us.

Revenue Generation

Despite as we know, the impact of Hurricane Beryl, 16% of GDP in July of 2024, the Grenadian economy demonstrated significant resilience, and we have ended up, at the end of 2024, with a growth rate of 3.7%, and that is commendable. **(Applause)** This budget projects a total revenue of EC$1.193 billion for 2025. Now, that is about 27% less revenue than Government took in 2024.

The truth is that Government underestimated what it would take in 2024, and due to stronger-than-expected CBI receipts, the Government reported total revenue and

grants of EC$1.647 billion for that period. This means that the Government collected more than it thought it would collect, resulting in a current account surplus. **(Applause)** As we understand it, some of this surplus in the Consolidated Fund is what Government will reinvest to finance the 2025 Budget. **(Applause)**

While we are happy to see the increase in inflows from CBI, we must remind ourselves that this is a non-tax revenue, and as such, it is more volatile, hence the estimated 27% projected decrease for 2025, as CBI receipts return to a more normalised level. In 2024, Government taxed revenue also grew by… so we are talking about CBI is not taxed, Government taxed revenue now, in 2024, grew by 4.3% to EC$891 million. Businesses brought in more goods and materials to supply the Grenadian economy and also for the rebuilding of Carriacou.

In addition to this, according to the figures from the Inland Revenue Department, following the amnesty, which should have brought mostly everyone current with their taxes, more corporate income tax was collected in 2024, and more of us are paying our land taxes than before. Madam President, we need to pay for what is ours. **(Applause)**

Inland Revenue has also stepped up its game. You can file your personal Income Tax online, you can file your PAYE online, you can file your VAT submissions online, making reporting easier for taxpayers and business people, Madam President. **(Applause)**

The 4.3% increase is reflective of those efficiency gains and proves two things. We do not need any new taxes. We just need a better collection on the existing ones, and most citizens will actually pay their taxes, provided that they know it is due and they can see where their money is going. **(Applause)** We want value for money, Madam President, value for money.

Madam President, speaking about the Inland Revenue Department, I've mentioned it before, and I will take the opportunity to mention it again. We would like Government to review the heavy interest-based system used by IRD to amplify the amount a taxpayer owes in a very short order. Keep or even enhance your penalties to encourage compliance, but get rid of the heavy compounding per month because that

only encourages defaults down the road and tax amnesties every 10 years or so.

I am reminded of this because I spoke to a taxpayer only about three weeks ago, a manufacturer, actually, and we don't have many of them around in Grenada, unfortunately, and that business owner owes more than half a million dollars in taxes, due to this compounding over a period of months. We don't want businesses to fold, especially manufacturers. With the trade imbalance that we have now, with the increase in trade deficit, we don't want this. So let's have a conversation about this issue and find a workable solution going forward.

On the subject of the National Transformation Fund, we are pleased to receive a report for the first time entitled Report on Contingency Fund based on an amendment passed in this House in 2023 that stipulates 10% of CBI inflows to the National Transformation Fund shall be directed to the Contingency Fund. The first deposit was made in July 2023, and although the account is still in its early stages, with the passage of Hurricane Beryl, it is also relevant, and we commend the Government for this saving initiative. **(Applause)**

Madam President, according to the Minister for Finance, the Budget has been fully financed. Madam President, all of these useful programmes being rolled out come at a cost. The following is noted from the Budget Document. Under Vote 22 of the Budget Document titled Charges on Account of Public Debt, under interest charges, we note that the Government budgeted EC$57 million for interest charges for 2024, when in reality, they paid out EC$122 million in 2024. It seems to me that they did not anticipate this sizeable interest payment.

The explanation we received for this in the notes is as follows: "Interest payments jumped to EC$112.4 million in 2024, 116% above the budgeted figure of EC$57 million. The significant increase in interest payments is due to the CBI bonus payment to holders of the 2030 International Bonds in accordance with the bond indenture agreement signed as part of the 2015 debt restructuring exercise". Madam President, these payouts more than double the interest payments for both 2024 and 2025. The figure this year is EC$129 million. Note that in 2026, interest payments are budgeted to fall back in line to EC$61

million.

Madam President, we know that debt is a necessity for a country, especially such a small nation as ours. However, the management of debt is so very critical. Madam President, Grenada's total debt stands at EC$2.2 billion. By comparison, in 2023 our total debt stood at EC$2.16 million, an increase of about EC$45 million or so for the year. If it were just the debt, the principal only, that would be straightforward, but the varied costs of different types of debt, varied maturity dates and varying interest rates on that debt can cause countries to enter a debt trap if debt is not monitored carefully.

We saw Jamaica struggle, for example, for about a decade when its debt-to-GDP ratio went up to 147%. After years of sacrifice, today, they are back down to about 75%. Madam President, although we are pleased to learn from the IMF's February Report that our debt-to-GDP ratio is continuing on a downward trajectory, there is no clear statement as to the current percentage of debt as a percentage of GDP for the end of 2024 in the statements. I'm not seeing any. I stand corrected if there is. Assuming a timely return to the fiscal rules in 2027, public debt is projected to continue to fall, reaching the debt target of 60% by 2030, and it is my hope that we can beat that target.

Debt is like if you go on a beach and you are waving in the water, if you are on the sand and not in the water, it's easy to move around. If the water is at your ankles, it's a little bit more difficult; if it's at your knees, it's more difficult; if it's at your waist, even more difficult. So imagine the body as 100% and imagine our debt at 60%, and you're trying to move through the water. That's just to provide a little imagery as to what the debt can do; it can actually cause you to drown. So that is why we have to be particular about it and monitor it closely.

Madam President, I want our citizens to understand this. We speak about value for money. When we speak about value for money, the Government intends to spend quite a lot in a very short space of time, especially this year, because we have already lost two and a half months of this year. While we believe the budget is a good one, a concern lies with being able to implement the plans as laid out in the Budget Document due to time constraints.

What none of us want is for the Government to pay and not get good quality work. So a lot of sacrifices have been made since the Structural Adjustment Programme to bring about our finances back on track. Our debt as a percentage of GDP in 2014 was 94%. We have made a lot of progress since then. Programmes being rolled out for the citizens of this country are indeed many, and many opportunities are bound for those in the private sector, especially in the area of construction. Government needs to make sure that the contractors they choose are qualified, and they need to make sure that the money they spend, the nation gets full value for every dollar. **(Applause)**

Advice to business people, irrespective of your sector, when you give the Government a quote, give them a competitive quote. I know that historically, the Government takes a long time to pay, so some people feel they have to raise the price because they will take a long time to get their money. But that is inflation, and I asked public servants to please process people's payments on time. If the Government can pay you, a public servant, twice a month, then the Government can pay the business once per month. The budget is fully financed. Therefore, let us not create inflationary pressures within our economy unnecessarily. Government needs to monitor more carefully the quality of work they pay for, especially this year, and the time frame in which it is done.

Madam President, there is an issue that needs to be addressed. This issue puts local businesses at a disadvantage compared to businesses outside of Grenada. Madam President, with the boom in construction, there are many projects that attract concessions. Most companies do not have duty-free bonds because they are too expensive to maintain. If a company that sells appliances, for example, wants to sell those appliances to an apartment project that has concessions, which company has to discount them by removing the duties already paid at the port and then make a claim to customs with the relevant documentation to get back their duties. Madam President, this takes months on end in most cases for businesses to get back their duties, tying up much-needed cash flow and thereby reducing competitiveness and profitability of the local business, and this has always been so. This has always been so for as far back as I can

remember.

If I make a legitimate claim based on a concessionary sale, why does it take months on end to get back my money from Government? We are asking for a 30-day turnaround time on this at most.

Madam President, someone in the "Other Place" said that he came to unblock pipes, and perhaps we may have to call him to unblock this one. Madam President, the budgeted concession to the busman, I think, in the amount of EC$12 million for 2025, is a good step. **(Applause)** We know that there is a Spice Bus Pilot Programme being rolled out currently, and we commend the Government for planning to improve safe access to education for our children. That's important. **(Applause)**

In speaking to an experienced bus operator last week, we spoke about… I mean, this guy has been operating a bus for over 25 years, and I've known him. We spoke about how Government can better assist bus owners and operators. There are some things that bus men purchase regularly perhaps those things can be added to Government's list of VAT free items, this way they can get a break on their main consumables such as oil, brakes and tyres, but the specific grade of oil, the specific model of brake and specific sizes of tyres are to be specified so that they can't be any abuse of the offering.

If Government considers adding certain items to the VAT-free list, know that the margins of these competitive items are already small and therefore movement of the price downward would be limited. We also spoke about gasoline rebates, where a bus man buys his gas and brings in the bill for a refund to the Government. This is tricky and can be abused because someone can fill up their car or so and put the bus number on the bill. So this one needs a little more thought, but gasoline and diesel remain the number one consumables of a bus.

Finally, whether it is electric buses or otherwise, bus owners should be entitled to a concession in the same way that taxi operators are. You can give 100% for the electric bus as it's given, and perhaps you can have 50% for the gasoline or diesel. This is probably the easiest way of giving them the concession up front, and the Government does not have to worry about monitoring VAT or gasoline rebates, extra work, something

for them to consider; perhaps it may be of benefit.

Madam President, EC$25 million in support for business reactivation in Carriacou was timely, necessary, and appreciated. Madam President, the business community also wishes to recognise the importance of raising the salaries of the members of the Royal Grenada Police Force. Having a committed police force is akin to investing in a safer Grenada. **(Applause)**

Madam President, we are also pleased to see that local developers can have the opportunity to benefit from CBI-funded projects by reducing fees for locally approved projects by 70%. Madam President, the money supply in our economy grew by 6.2% with increases in currency circulation and cash at commercial banks, indicating a stronger banking sector and higher cash transactions. People have more money in their accounts.

Private sector savings deposits increased by 7.7%. Private sector foreign currency deposits increased by 12% pointing towards a growing preference for holding foreign currency with which they could trade, buy goods abroad and expand their business. Madam President, private businesses don't go about saying that they made this sale target or that sale target in public. Only Inland Revenue and the banks know that information. Madam President, an engine does not boast about its power, but you would know if the engine is not working properly. **(Laughter)**

Madam President, to our bankers, we need more up-to-date forms of transacting payments. When I travel, I can pay with my mobile phone using multiple apps, AliPay, Apple Pay, and so forth. When I come back home, I have to pull out the cash or the card to enter my PIN to pay a bill. We need to keep up, and banks have the liquidity to keep up. Let's see some more up-to-date options for businesses and the general public.

Madam President, as the projected rate continues for a fourth year in a row by the mercy and permission of God Almighty, real GDP is expected to accelerate in 2025, reaching 4.1% driven by continued strong tourism demand and reconstruction activities. **(Applause)**

Madam President, year on year, tourism provides the largest single contribution to our GDP. Tourism was and is still everybody's business. By virtue of that fact, tourism

remains a priority sector and needs to continue to be treated as such and more and more we need to leverage this sector to support other sectors.

A perfect example of this is the recent partnership between the [2]GHTA and the Solid Waste Management Authority. The GHTA has a fund called the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF). Several hotels put a dollar or two into this one for every guest that stayed at their resort. Recently, the GHTA donated a heavy-duty glass crusher system to the Grenada Solid Waste Management Authority **(applause)** at a value of EC$486,000. Not only will this reduce the space these bottles take up in the landfill, but the crushed glass can also be recycled, exported, used in sidewalks, sandblasting, et cetera. These types of partnerships are commendable, and I thank the GHTA for its insight and outreach. **(Applause)**

Madam President, if I were in the hotel business, I would have my hand in the agriculture business as well. There is more motivation to do so now more than ever, and here is why. There is an elevated risk of reversal of inflation gains. Consumer prices, although projected to be moderate in the near future, could see unwanted increases due to some external effects and pressures such as the emerging trade conflict between the US and Canada, the US and China, the US and Mexico, et cetera. Did you know that Canada is America's largest supplier of crude oil? So if gas prices go up in the US, many goods that we import from the US, especially food, will also go up.

While some industries may ultimately gain from tariffs, some short-term disruption is likely and will be difficult to navigate away from. While it may be relatively easy to find alternative source markets, the challenge is getting them here. The vast majority of our trade is north-south trade, our import bill is still very high, and we have a huge trade deficit of over Ec$300 million. Sadly, year upon year, this has not significantly improved. This means that we are more and more dependent on food grown outside of Grenada to live the life that we currently live.

[2] Grenada Hotel and Tourism Association

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We are ever more sensitive to external shocks and imported inflation. Therefore, while we maintain our north-south trade and wait to see if and what impact comes our way, it is in our interest to increase south-south trade, and it is important that businesses within the same industry think about how they can source together from new southern markets. We all have to do what we can to keep inflation down. **(Applause)**

An example of a close southern market with which we already have very good relations is Guyana, and they have a strong agricultural industry, and perhaps those in the importation of food can look at bolstering their imports at a cheaper rate.

Apart from the emerging trade conflicts, there is a regulatory shipping agency by the name of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). They do a lot of good work in ensuring that standards are maintained in the global shipping industry and so on. However, they have recently come up with an environmental standard for ships all over the world based on greenhouse gas emissions that rates these ships according to their efficiency and penalises them for the inefficiencies. It sounds good, but listen to how it affects us.

I've been told by shipping experts that the way they calculate the efficiency gains favours vessels that travel longer distances. Think of it this way. A car that travels on the highway burns less fuel compared to one that stops and goes in rural traffic. The freight liners that call on the Caribbean islands travel shorter distances and stop very often. As a result, they seem more inefficient due to our geography.

Tropical Shipping, for example, has one of the newest fleets in the region. Many of their ships are about six years old. They have made changes to their ships to reduce drag, and still they are at a C rating, A being the best, and E being a vessel that is not considered to be seaworthy from an environmental point of view.

The point here is that any charges or penalties incurred by these liners will be passed on to the end consumer as additional charges. Compounding this is the time the vessel has to spend docked to offload its cargo. Remember, the vessel is still burning fuel while it is docked, so the faster we can offload that ship and reload it with the empties so it can go on its way, the lower the operating costs and the lower the freight rates can

be.

Madam President, with economic growth, increased cargo volumes are flowing into our port faster than before, creating new challenges. Since September of last year, our main port has been congested. We are not typically in a busy season at this time, but the port is still congested.

Madam President, when a ship docks, from the time the container lands on the ground, the clock starts. The container is then cleared within five free days, either on-site or, in the case of many businesses, off-site. When it returns empty, it goes back on the port waiting for pickup. The shipping company is given 12 days before rent starts on their empty boxes. As goods come in due to space constraints, these containers are stacked three to four high. We see them on the port when you pass every day.

Vessels that come in from Miami once a week, after that week, they request their empties that are nearing the 12-day mark in order to avoid paying rent for those containers. The port now has to move other containers that are on top of that container in order to get it out. This overworks the port equipment and wastes time, costing the taxpayers and businesses alike due to these inefficiencies. Some possible ways initially to ease this are as follows:

1. Extend the operating hours of the port – Stagger the workforce so that daylight hours are maximised. Work can start at 6 a.m. and end at 5:00 p.m., but service to the public would be the same, 8 :00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.;
2. Increase the size of the port – Look for lands over an acre in size, one mile from the Port, engage the owners to lease or purchase land to store the vehicles that come in and congest the port;
3. The sheds on the port are quite high – Invest in vertical storage for barrels and break bulk cargo. When you go in there, everything is at one ground level, and it is always full, but there is space up. More challenging options will be four and five;
4. Expand the port into Tanteen Playing Field using the road that divides them as a port road only, and have your storage on the Tanteen side; and

5. Select a new port site for a long-term solution.

The top three can be implemented with relative ease, the other two would require consultation from stakeholders should Government have the appetite to do so.

Madam President, in January, I met with a company owned by Grenadians here and abroad who have partnered with a US HR firm to bring in professionals that we may need when we need them, when there is a shortage of labour from engineers to seasonal labourers.

I personally believe that you can't scale agriculture in this country without seasonal labourers. As a matter of fact, for the new hospital, there would be certain skills that we will have to attract, skills that we do not have currently, and if there are professionals that Grenada needs and those skills or qualifications are a priority for us, we need to consider a pathway to citizenship for those who have that skill.

Maybe certain types of engineers, for example, if we find out that we have oil in commercial quantities, such that it is a viable industry to pursue, there are certain professionals that we will have to attract. This is why citizenship by invitation is a good idea, and the business community supports this.

Madam President, agriculture has been lagging behind tourism, not merely because of a lack of incentives. We know that vehicle and equipment concessions are readily given. We know that tool concessions are given. We know that fertilisers are sold at concessionary prices. We know that the plant costs of the plant material are subsidised, and this has always been the case. The issue with agriculture is not merely concessions. The main issue, in my view, is management, and that is why the model must change. Five questions: what to plant, when to plant it, how much of it to plant, who will plant it and where it will be planted. All of them require a plan, and planning and execution are functions of management. Moving on.

Madam President, Cannabis. This is the first time I've spoken on this. I have held my tongue for quite some time, and I wish to say a little bit about that at this time. Marijuana for medical purposes is a proven good, and marijuana for the young, developing brain is a proven bad or ill. This is not debatable. In the same way that we

know that smoking now causes cancer, we know that marijuana is bad for the developing brain.

How do we take advantage of the medical commercial aspect while safeguarding the minds of our youth? We have to have guard words. Here are two that come to my mind. I heard some talk about personal trees in the backyard, whether it is two, four, six or eight. I believe Trinidad has that. Madam President, the police have a hard time getting the buses to stop at the bus stop. How will they know what is in a man's backyard? This is an impossible task. So, this, to me, does not make any sense.

Currently, those who want to smoke it know how to get it, and they also know that it is currently illegal. So what is the point of having it in the backyard? Not everyone can produce alcohol, but almost anyone can grow a plant. So the risk with marijuana is much greater. Madam President, some employees actually smoke before they go to work, and you can only imagine what that does for productivity in the workplace. I have had my fair share of them, so I know.

Marijuana is a door towards other brain-damaging drugs. It is a door towards other brain-damaging drugs. Madam President, I have seen at least three of my employees, for lack of a better term, "trip off" due to smoking. Substance abuse has destroyed their livelihood. It has destroyed it. I am not saying marijuana did it. I am saying that marijuana is a door to other substances. I rest my case on that subject for now.

Moving on to a moral education. A moral education. Madam President, no longer can we rely on the parents only to teach the children morality. I am speaking about basic morality. I am not speaking about theology. No longer can we rely on parents only to teach their children morality, because we have a lot of broken homes, to teach respect for elders, to teach respect for authority and the difference between what is good and what is vice. I strongly recommend a non-denominational morality enrichment programme through the Ministry of Education or Social Affairs. We can call it MORE—Moral Outreach Education. Let's get MORE out of life than money and worldly success.

Madam President, the nation and the people of Sodom did not fail because they were poor. They failed because they were immoral, bent on disobedience to the Most

High. So morality has an aspect in society; a very important aspect in society. Madam President, I commit to volunteering some time to ensure that we build up this idea together, which is acceptable to the Government. We want a balanced society, a society with wealth and good moral fibre. A moral education is beneficial and must not be overlooked. It can help to avoid some of the pitfalls and traps of worldly life. And, Madam President, finally, on this, there is a reason why God Almighty is mentioned twice in our National Anthem.

Road Congestion. Traffic congestion affects our productivity on a daily basis, especially in the south of the island. In addition to the importation restriction on used cars being considered by the Government, there are other measures that the Government can consider. The moving of excavators, cranes, and other heavy equipment should be moved between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. That's an easy one. Let's move it at night.

Road repair work on main roads should also be done at the same time, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. If Government can afford to light up the fields, the primary contractor can buy a few lights to do his work. Right? If we can play sports at night, we can do work at night. Concrete and other heavy trucks should move about 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., and also from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. So, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., avoids the rest of us on the road until we find more suitable solutions and wider roads.

Whether it is a business, a food stall, a vendor, a day care or a religious gathering, the main road is currently being used as a parking lot. There is blatant disregard for traffic rules, and I must say that I am happy to see a greater police presence on and around key places of congestion, such as Sugar Mill and also the Bus Terminal in town. Perhaps police presence also needs to be on the Cliff or along the Woburn main road, as that other road is closed off.

Madam President, in some recent travels, I have noticed that on the plane, they serve small dark chocolates, to be exact. I've seen it on Virgin and I've seen it on another airline, I can't recall. These chocolates, we already produce them here so whilst on the flight, I thought to myself, why are we not providing these airlines perhaps one of our chocolate companies may not have the volume to supply one airline, but surely if they

were to make a product jointly, we could supply it and to be honest when I taste our product and I taste what is offered on the airline there is no comparison. There is really no comparison. So we really need to look into these opportunities. You know, when they come to Grenada, we have to have something to stock the plane up for their journey back to the UK, and so perhaps this is an idea that came to mind, perhaps we can take advantage of this.

Labour. Madam President, who is not working in Grenada, we can put them into three categories. They don't have the right skills needed for the job. They don't want to work, meaning a poor work ethic. They do the bare minimum, and so they don't last on the job. Those who are simply unemployable due to attitude and poor work ethic.

Other than those three, the vast majority of Grenadians of working-class age are gainfully employed. As a matter of fact, Labour is in short supply, and this is a sign of a growing economy. **(Applause)**

Madam President, in the private sector, we need more brokers, we need more accountants, we need more account clerks, we need more supervisors, we need more middle managers. These are just some of the jobs that are available and hard to fill.

Recently, we have seen the implementation of the ETA Programme in the UK. So any foreigner who has to travel to the UK has to register online through this ETA program, and I think the rate is about £8, so the UK Government is collecting from everybody internationally £8 to pass through, just to pass through, even if they are in transit to pass through their country. And I thought that CARICOM needs to consider an ETA Programme of our own.

Our ETA can stand for Environmental Travel Allocation. We are not immune to hurricanes throughout the region, and perhaps at US$10 in light of the impacts of climate change, not only relying on insurance pay outs for future and possibly more frequent disasters. I don't believe that anyone will change their mind on coming to the Caribbean for over US$10, and so if we, at the CARICOM level, are able to implement such a system for all of the foreigners that come into the region, we will be able to establish a fund through CARICOM that will be able to help our brother and sister in the event of a

hurricane and not have to reach out to people abroad, outside of CARICOM. We will be more self-reliant.

Madam President, when we think about oil and gas, as I've said, if we have it in commercial quantities, let us not reinvent the wheel. We have a very good relationship with Guyana to the south, and they have already trodden the path to developing their oil industry. They can guide us so that we don't make mistakes that perhaps they would have made. And if that opportunity avails itself, wouldn't it be wise to say to our neighbours, help us to develop this industry, help us with your engineers, help us with your professionals to develop this industry so that we can make a success out of it. Even if you have to receive something out of it, Madam President, half a loaf is better than none.

So, that is provided, we have not heard from the committee yet that is doing the research… That is provided that we have, and as a lay person, I mean, if Trinidad has it and Guyana has it, we're right there in the mix, we've got to have something. Right? My point is, let us reach out to our partners in the region, our brothers and sisters in the region and have them help us so that we do not make costly mistakes.

As I begin to wrap up my presentation, I want to stick to the hour. I don't want to ask for extra time. I wish to mention a few names of businessmen who have passed on in recent times. Their lives and their work have helped shape our country and our economy in many ways. They have contributed to their sectors in many ways. Indeed, there are others worthy of being mentioned, but these three are within recent times and ought to be remembered for their contributions to Grenada

1. Mr. Royston Hopkin, founder of Spice Island Beach Resort; **(applause)**
2. Mr. Michael McIntyre, founder of McIntyre Brothers; **(applause)**
3. Mr. Lydon Rhamdanny, co-founder of LL Rhamdanny Co. Ltd. **(Applause)**

May they rest in eternal peace. Amen.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the business community for their support and the opportunity to serve them in this House. I am open to criticism, and I am open to correction, and the intent is to fulfil my responsibility without fear of favour and to say it

as I see it.

And in closing, Madam President, I would like to read a quote from the scripture that I adhere to, the Quran, and it reads, "Undoubtedly, a moment in time has passed by man when he was not even something worth mentioning", meaning he was not in existence, he was not created. "Undoubtedly, a moment in time has passed by man when he was not even something worth mentioning. Indeed, we have created man from a mixed seed to test him, and we have made him a hearing and seeing being. We have guided him to the path of righteousness through many prophets that came over time to mankind, so he is either grateful by following or ungrateful by rejecting". May God Almighty guide us in this House. May God Almighty guide us as a nation. May God Almighty bless us and bless this land now and forever. Amen. I thank you. **(Applause)**

Madam President: I thank Senator Rahaman, most of all, for your opening and closing prayers and for all that lies between those two prayers. Thank you for paying tribute to your fellow businessmen. Like others before you, you too have made some recommendations based on your analysis and review, and I believe the "Other Side" would take that on board. Thank you, also, for staying on time.

Let me now offer the floor to Senator Quinc Britton to make his contribution. Senator Britton, one hour plus or minus.

Sen. the Hon. Quinc Britton: Madam President, when I looked at the time, I saw it was 4:00 p.m., so I was thinking it's time for us to go home. **(Laughter)** I see a lot of people leaving.

Nevertheless, Madam President, this is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalms 118:24.

Madam President, I, too, rise to support the 2025 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure presented on March 7, 2025, by the Honourable Minister for Finance, Honourable Dennis Cornwall, under the theme "Towards Vision 75: Grenada—Resilient

and Rising". Madam President, through my thorough review of Budget 2025, as well as review from the past 12 months, permit me to delve into some key takeaways from the Budget Document, Madam President.

If you look closely at the Budget document, you will see and you will recognise that it is a transformative budget and it's aimed at improving the lives of the ordinary Grenadians, not just for now, but for years to come. I've noticed the re-alignment of some of the ministries, Madam President, which I'm very excited with the new changes that it would bring to benefit all of our citizens throughout the tri-island state in particular the citizens of St. Mark, and I say St. Mark because that's where I'm from, Madam President, and, you know, I would have a bit of biasness when it comes to recognising some of the achievements and so on. Though I'm not the elected MP, Madam President, so I'm very mindful of that, but I must record my thanks and appreciation to the various ministries for assisting us in one way or another, Madam President.

Madam President, permit me to quote from the Budget Document, which says, "Our leadership and composure in the face of disasters have not gone unnoticed. Reputable regional and international organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the Caribbean Development Bank, have lauded our prudent approach in preparing for and in navigating the relief and recovery from Hurricane Beryl thus far". **(Applause)**

Madam President, EC$630 million or 16% of our gross domestic product, our GDP, particularly affecting Carriacou, Petite Martinique, the northern parishes of the mainland, namely St. Patrick, St. Andrew and St. Mark, which have gotten their fair share of the ravages of Hurricane Beryl. In St. Mark in particular, Madam President, over 60 homes were impacted, with eight being completely destroyed. Madam President, in that regard, we must place our thanks and appreciation to the following ministries: the Ministry of MIT, the Ministry of Social Development, Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs, my colleague, and her team for their excellent work. Also, Madam President, I see in the gallery that I have my Housing Assistant Coordinator. They worked tirelessly, providing assistance in the immediate aftermath, and some of the people in the gallery as

well. I'm very, very happy to see them, take a bow.

Madam President, thus far, for our quick response, one way or the other from the Ministry of Social Development, Gender Affairs, MIT, Build Back Better Housing Project, it is ongoing in that regard, Madam President, as well as the BRIS Programme. As mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of that, people in St. Mark are very grateful for that assistance.

As we go on, Madam President, in the budget, I also see we have Agriculture and Food Security, Madam President. An investment in Agriculture and Fisheries, or the new name for that Ministry, which involves Fisheries, is the Blue Economy and Marine Affairs. Madam President, 4,862 farmers as well as 279 fisherfolk receive cash grants or other forms of direct support. **(Applause)** That is commendable.

In the area of Food Security, Madam President, a new breed of livestock was brought in, Madam President, totalling an amount of EC$4 million. Our dear Minister for Agriculture is right here, Madam President, and in the "Other Place" when I heard he mentioned that the mortality rate, or due to the whole traveling and so on, it was almost 0% of, you know, any of those hybrid goat, sheep or pigs dying because the stress that they have to go through from traveling from one… the change in climatic condition from one area to another, in the tropic, they normally would develop something called, travel fever, and so far they have been surviving well. I got a first-hand experience to see some of the goats and the pigs, and trust me, they're ready to eat by next month. **(Laughter)**

Madam President: The public official's response to bringing them warned us that they were not for eating, and it turns out that he is sitting right behind you, so you'd better be careful.

Sen. the Hon. Quinc Britton: I am saying all that to say, Madam President, that they look fit for consumption. **(Laughter)** So let me be diplomatic about how I use my words.

Madam President, together with livestock and poultry, investment in that area is highly commendable. As we speak, Madam President, a team from the Caribbean

Development Bank they are on the ground in St. Mark. They were in St. John this morning doing some assessments and so on. This week, they are doing an appraisal. It is a mission that conducts appraisals for climate responses and projects to be developed. Like I said, they were in St. John this morning, and I got an update that they are in St. Mark, which I look forward to, Madam President.

In the area of Youth and Sports, Madam President. We received support through the Ministry of Youth and Sports as we… I don't know if everyone knows that, but every constituency has access to a Community Sports Fund to the tune of EC$25,000, which, in my view, Madam President, goes a long way. It could do a lot more. We are tremendously grateful for it. We were able to sponsor every sports meet in St. Mark with all the different schools and so on, making requests, whether it's medals as the case may be. So we were able to make that intervention, and we are forever grateful to the Ministry of Youth and Sports for that kind of intervention, Madam President. So I just want to place my thanks and appreciation for that.

Madam President, Infrastructure. Again, thanks to the various ministries and so on, including the Ministry of Social and Community Development, Housing, and Gender Affairs. They assisted in a number of different projects, including the Ministry of Infrastructure and MIT. Some of the projects which are ongoing right now, as we speak, in St. Mark, Madam President, if you permit me, just to name a few. Greater access to the Alston George Park and the Victoria Beach area, catering to the needs of the differently able individuals with proper ramp and stairs access with rails, Madam President.

That has never happened before. Since I was a child growing up in the community, seeing those things that needed to be addressed, Madam President. Imagine that, since I was a child, especially the boardwalk that we did right in the town of Victoria, next to the Victoria Hotel. That is very, very impactful, and the people in the community **(applause)** can attest to how impactful that was.

Madam President, I am giving all these details and so on because you would only hear these things coming from the "Government Side". You would not hear that anywhere

else, Madam President. So I have to record my thanks and appreciation to the various Ministries for doing such.

I move on, Madam President, to the basketball court upgrades. Madam President. One, it is about 90% completed in Waltham, St. Mark. Actually, it's right in the compound or the vicinity of St. Mark's Secondary School, which has over 400 students enrolled there. And this basketball court has been in a state of disrepair for one reason or another since I was going to school there 20 years ago. So we only saw it fitting, Madam President, that if we talk about investing in our young people and so on, that we make sure we create the enabling environment so that they can do different sporting disciplines and so on. We are thankful to the Ministry of Sports, who continue to provide maintenance of a playing field that is right next to the basketball court, which used to be many, many years ago, during our African descent, it used to be a slave pen. So it is now a playing field, so the students utilise that, and the principal and staff are very grateful for that kind of intervention, ensuring that you know we take care of the facilities because it's not just used by the students but by the community as well, Madam President.

Project Stop and Think. Under the Ministry of Social and Community Development, we embarked upon a project called "Stop and Think" through the kind courtesies of Doctor Neals Chitan, and I must record my thanks and appreciation to him. When we recognise that many of our youths are misguided and need some form of intervention, he came up with this behavioural modification programme where he did that almost every day of the week in seven different communities, Madam President, throughout the length and breadth of Grenada. At the end, they got a certificate. In St. Mark, we had over 50 of them registered and participated in that project. So, that, Madam President, is highly commendable. **(Applause)** I have to place it on record.

We continue our work, Madam President, with community centres upgrade, some of which my colleague mentioned earlier, Union Community Centre, Nonpareil, Maran Community Centre, Madam President, some of which are ongoing, and we are also installing a management committee to manage the affairs of those community centres, Madam President.

Toilet and bathroom facility upgrade. We did one in the town of Victoria in an area called Villa and another in Course Guard. Madam President, and as my colleague mentioned, the facilities that we upgraded have been painted in the standard colours that are from the Ministry of Social Development. When you see it, you know that's a project that was done under the Ministry of Social Development.

Housing, Madam President. We are tremendously grateful, Madam President. Like I mentioned before, my housing assistant is here. Over 105 housing applications were approved, with 33 new houses constructed, 31 repaired. Madam President, 40 bathroom and toilet applications were approved, with 11 being constructed, all in 2024, Madam President, and some of which are ongoing, and we have more to come in this year's allocation. Thus far, Madam President, in 2024, over EC1 million was spent in housing assistance alone in our constituency or parish in St. Mark. That is extremely commendable. **(Applause)** Madam President, so we are grateful.

Water and Sanitation in Homes (WASH). This project, Madam President, will commence very soon in St. Mark, for which we are truly grateful. It is an initiative through Nation Builders. Already, Madam President, we have about 25 persons who have already applied, so we are going to continue our engagement with stakeholders to make sure that it is successful for this year, so we can implement it very successfully.

Quickly moving along with Infrastructure, Madam President. Like I said, we'd only hear those comments and so on "This Side" or in "This House", Madam President, but the good thing is that they are happening in the constituency or in my parish, which I'm extremely grateful for as an ordinary citizen within the parish of St. Mark.

We are grateful to the Ministry of Economic Development and Planning through BNTF, Madam President, and if you would permit me to just segue a little bit. Last week, as I mentioned, there's a team from the Caribbean Development Bank that funds BNTF, as well as the Government, which would do their part in funding whatever project and so on that they identify. We had a visitation from a team last week, and I was invited. BNTF invited me to come and take a look at two projects that are ongoing in Bonair, one is Bonair Bridge, which is 85% completed, and the other is Victoria School for Special

Education, which is at the foundation level still because of some delays in redesigning and so on at that school.

When I was introduced to the team, one of the gentlemen officials from CDB, when the lady from BNTF had introduced me, he asked me, "Are you the Senator who posted the video"? I asked, "Which video"? He said, "Yes, some years ago you posted a video on the bridge". My posting or my creation of that video, Madam President, was in no way, shape or form to make the ruling administration, at the time, and that was in 2019, thereabout. That was no way, like I said, to make the MP or the ruling administration look bad in any way, shape or form, but just calling on them to intervene on the deterioration of the bridge, asking for some maintenance to be done on the bridge, surely, my voice or the video didn't go unnoticed. They closed it for a prior time. They did some remedial work on it, which was, really, Madam President, just putting a window dressing on an injury.

So it called for more attention to be placed, and thankfully, my video made it to social media. Well, I did it on social media, I did a live, and the people from the Caribbean Development Bank were able to see and have a better appreciation. So thankfully, I had some kind of influence, I should say. At the time, the Government could have let it fall on deaf ears, so I must place my record and appreciation to them. Sorry, they're not here to receive their credits, to, you know, recognise that this is very important to the people who commute there on a daily basis. You have three schools in which that bridge served in the area: Bonair Government School, Victoria Preschool and Victoria School Special Education, Madam President. So this is something that is very commendable.

Upon assuming office, this Administration, in every consultation that was held together with the BNTF that I was invited to, I made sure I showed up. As part of additional works when the original bridge was demolished or before it was demolished, we had to ensure that we put a temporary structure in place, so that the villagers could commute without any interruption whilst the new bridge was being constructed. So like I said, Madam President, it's 85% complete. I would really, really like to place my thanks and appreciation to the… Well, it's not by coincidence that the Line Minister is here for that,

so thank you very much to you and your team for a job well done.

Madam President… If you permit me, Madam President, to delve in a bit. The ministry which I represent, the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Economy and Culture, has a number of statutory bodies, and so on, on the vision that is part of our ministry, Madam President, and if you would permit me, I would just like to give brief updates on some of those ministries, Madam President. Sorry, some of these…

Madam President: Excuse me again, Senator, are these updates in relation to the 2025 Budget?

Sen. the Hon. Quinc Britton: Yes, Madam President,

Madam President: Please ensure that.

Sen. the Hon. Quinc Britton: Yes.

Madam President: Thank you.

Sen. the Hon. Quinc Britton: Starting with, Madam President, the Grenada Cultural Foundation. The Grenada Cultural Foundation, Madam President, falls directly under our ministry, Madam President, and they get a subvention to operate on an annual basis. Cultural Foundation, they facilitated and formed the Traditional Mas Band Association, the acronym for that is TIMBA, and for the first time, they brought all the traditional mas bands in Grenada, whether it was the Vieux, Short Knee, Wild Indian, et cetera, they brought them under one umbrella, so they are the ones that are responsible for that. Kudos must be given to them for that.

Also, for the first time, you saw TIMBA participating in Rainbow City as a band parading through the streets of Grenville last year, Madam President. That I must commend again. They also had done some documentation on recordings of four

calypsonians as part of a calypso series, which brings the greater spotlight onto the art of calypso.

The Grenada Cultural Foundation also supports other parish organisations, namely in activities like Carriacou Carnival, La Poterie Saraka, St. Mark's Organisation for Development and St. Patrick's Organisation for Development (SMOD and SPOD). Assistant is also given to River Sallee Saraka, Carrière, Bashalaka, Carriacou Maroon and String Band Festival, Virgin Parish Celebration, Petite Martinique Witsuntide Regatta Festival, Fisherman Birthday, and Indian Arrival Day, Madam President, just to name a few.

The foundation also executed two activities on Emancipation Day, one was in collaboration with the St. Andrew's Development Organisation and the other in the Town of St. George, Madam President. The foundation also collaborated with some community and parish groups to host an Aunty Tek Festival, nationwide, for the first time.

GCF also facilitated a review of the carnival, which took place in the trade centre and spice basket, respectively. And a final report and the fact-finding were shared with the minister, my colleague, right there, Madam President, and we're looking to implement some of those recommendations in 2025.

And finally, under the Grenada Cultural Foundation… A delegation from the cultural foundation, the CEO, as well as the Chairman of the Board, went to Carriacou with a view to exploring ways of building greater synergy and preserving Grenadian culture, Madam President. Though it's a small team, they're very effective, Madam President. They are looking to reform the team, the whole organisation, in terms of rebranding and so on, so that they can have a new logo and you know, just make sure that they stay within the goals and the mission and the objectives of the cultural foundation, Madam President.

Madam President, you can also permit me to go on to Spicemas Corporation, which is also a subsidiary that falls directly under the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Economy and Culture. To date, a lot of staff development training has been done, Madam President. The product review, like I mentioned, of carnival was done, and presently,

they are working on implementing those recommendations, as I mentioned.

One of the activities that just concluded was the unveiling of seven delegates to vie for the title of National Carnival Queen, and they had set up a committee to do the casting call, et cetera, Madam President. That's how we came up with it. There are, right now… Some meetings and engagement are ongoing with stakeholders for traditional mas, fancy mas, et cetera, some of which will take place this weekend, Madam President, and that I say is very, very commendable.

They are also trying to ensure that, in building the capacity of the Spicemas Corporation, they are working closely together with the ministry to build some more capacity areas of sponsorship, PR, marketing, social media, et cetera, et cetera.

Last, but certainly not least, Madam President, we have the official launch of Spice Mas, which is, not too far from now, on the first Friday of May, May 2, which is not too far from now. I don't know if you would sit before that, but I can extend an official invite to persons.

Finally, I know I said last, **(laughter)** but finally the judges… I'm taking cue from my learned friend on the "Other Side" there from earlier on, but I wouldn't speak as long as he normally does. **(Laughter)** Judges and Artists Workshop schedule for next month, April. Registration and so on for that will commence in the coming week… Subcommittees for logistic production… So we expect this year's carnival, Madam President, as we market this year's carnival as one of the safest in the region, but an improved one from years gone by.

We've already started an economic impact assessment as to what the value of carnival is because we cannot really put a value on saying, "Well, the Government would invest X amount". We need to know because everyone, the stakeholders, the hotels to the taxis, et cetera… So we are doing a comprehensive review as to how much money is injected into the economy for that, and as soon as we have that, Madam President, we will make it public. So when Government decides to inject some more money into it, people wouldn't say or feel that we are wasting money, or that we are spending badly, **(applause)** because we can't really put a value on that.

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Madam President, as I quickly move on, I want to delve a bit into the museum. The museum also falls under our purview from the ministry, Madam President. The museum in 2024 was a pivotal year for the Grenada National Museum, marked by significant strides towards aligning its operation with the transformative vision outlined in the 2025 to 2029 strategic plan.

The museum has taken deliberate steps to strengthen its governance, enhance visitors' engagements and build capacity to deliver on its mission and preserve and promote Grenada's rich cultural heritage, Madam President. Madam President, the museum in 2025 will focus on implementing a strategic plan. The focus on the strategic plan will begin with governance and policy development. This institutional framework is necessary for the effective and efficient management, which will be crucial for the implementation of the other aspects of the strategic plan, which include addressing infrastructure and community engagement.

The museum has undertaken a number of initiatives, Madam President, one of which is the conducting of extensive repairs. You know… I don't know when last you visited the museum, Madam President, you know, over the years, I think it's because it's been a very old building, so you had to do some maintenance to make sure that you know we make it safe and so that both locals and visitors alike can feel comfortable whilst they are there, Madam President. We have a number of initiatives coming up for this year. Let me just name a few.

- Caribbean Ties – Explore Regional Heritage and Interconnected Histories.
- An exhibition coming up called Say My Name. It's an exhibition focused on the lives of the enslaved Africans in Grenada.
- Ivan 20-Plus – Commemorates the impact of Hurricane Ivan and highlights resilience and recovery.
- Another one preparation is on the way for the collaborative Carnival Queen from 1945 to 1975. That's an exhibition which will be done in collaboration with Mr. Ricardo Keens-Douglas.

Madam President, permit me to move on to the Grenada office of Creative Affairs,

commonly known as GOCA. Madam President, we would like to celebrate the remarkable achievements that we have accomplished together in the creative sector.

Through our unwavering commitment and innovative ideas, we have laid a robust foundation for growth and sustainability that empowers our creative community. When I say that, Madam President, concessions for creatives, empowering our artists. Let's begin with the concession for creatives.

A cornerstone of our efforts to support the creative community, this has provided 100% of essential tools of trade, equipment, and raw materials, allowing over 95 creative businesses to thrive. That, Madam President, is remarkable. **(Applause)** This initiative has transformed the lives. In 2024, we granted a total of EC$1.4 million in concessions with revenue forgone, that's revenue that the Government did not collect, of EC$750,000, Madam President. This isn't just a number, but is a live blood for our Creatives, enabling them to reinvest in the business, upgrade their offerings, and ultimately drive innovation within the sector. We are also empowering individuals who are creating jobs, Madam President, not just for themselves, but for their entire communities.

Madam President, TAMCC collaboration – Investing in education for our Creatives. This is a very boring initiative, Madam President. In 2023, we took a bold leap, Madam President, a bold leap forward through our educational collaboration with the T. A. Marryshow Community College. My dear friend and Minister of Education, we'd like to thank you all for accommodating us in that regard.

We awarded 139 scholarships valued at EC$91,740, Madam President, enabling our Creatives to access specialised courses tailored to the cultural and creative industries. The results speak volumes, Madam President, with an 87 successful passes of equipped individuals with vital skills needed for businesses to thrive, Madam President. Most importantly, the credits earned from these courses will seamlessly transition into TAMCC's upcoming Associate Degree Programme in Creative and Cultural Industries launching in September of 2025. **(Applause)** This is remarkable.

For the first time, we have an Associate Degree offered at TAMCC, Madam President. Before, we only used to look at Creatives as just mere talents. We have a

little talent, you could sing, to draw, we can dance, and that's it, your parent might want you to go into the traditional jobs, of being a doctor, a lawyer, but why not follow your passion?

I'll give you a little example, Madam President. When I was going up every time my mother got a report card, she wanted to ring my ears, simply because I was a great student, but I talked too much. **(Laughter)** Madam President, if I had not talked, where would I be today? I would have come here to make sign language? **(Laughter)** I'm making the point, Madam President, to let our parents and guardians encourage their children as well as their loved ones to explore their talents and their passions, Madam President. We are creating pathways for future leaders in the creative sector, nurturing talents like never before.

The Cultural and Creative Industry Business Development Fund. Madam President, let us not overlook the monumental impact of the Cultural and Creative Industries Business Development Fund launch in December of 2023. With an initial allocation, Madam President, EC$2 million, we marked the turning point in the financial landscape for creative enterprises. By January of 2025, we had successfully disbursed nearly EC$1.5 million to 91 recipients. We provided loans to 28 recipients totalling EC$808,000, grants to 28 recipients totalling EC$491,000, and vouchers for the recipients totalling EC$158,000. This fund has been an indispensable tool in alleviating financial burden and fuelling the growth of the creative enterprise throughout Grenada.

Building institutional capacity, from vision to reality. Madam President, we believe that building a future where our creative sectors are organised and empowered is why we initiated a project to facilitate the establishment of an association for five major subsectors, including music, visual arts and craft, festival performing arts and celebration, audio-visual and interactive media and astronomy.

We have already funded and facilitated the formation of the association for music producers and performers, with the other four associations expected to be formally established in April. Through expert guidance, we are equipping creatives with the necessary tools for effective governance and sustainable operations. We have ignited a

new era of creativity where collaboration is at the forefront.

Music studios and elevate our producers. Madam President, thanks to the Business Development Fund in 2024, we have funded the refurbishment of four music studios with another six upgrades currently in progress and are expected to be completed by May of this year, Madam President. **(Applause)**

No longer will our local producers be confined to make-shift setups, and they will now have state-of-the-art equipment and the facility that they deserve. This, Madam President, is not just talk but putting our money where our mouth is. **(Applause)** For the first time, we are giving our producers the recognition and support that they have long awaited. These are the individuals behind many of our top national hits, and with the support that they are receiving now, for them, the sky is the limit.

Madam President, we are not standing still. We have completed extensive research and consultation, culminating in the development of a five-year strategic plan for the creative sector. This plan is our blueprint for building a thriving creative industry that benefits all Grenadians. Let us set the record straight. We are moving beyond idle talk. We are taking decisive action. Our creative community is receiving the structured support it needs to flourish, and we stand united with our mission to propel Grenada's creative sector forward. **(Applause)**

Madam President, as I close on the Office of Creative Affairs, GOCA, these achievements exemplify our commitment to nurturing creativity and innovation within Grenada. Together, we have laid a powerful foundation for the future of our creative Industries, a bright future where every creative voice is celebrated, supported and empowered. Let us continue this momentum. Let's champion our creatives and invest in them. **(Applause)** So, Madam President, that was my presentation on the Grenada Office of Creative Affairs.

I think I see… Not, I think. I see some lovely ladies here. They are also a part of our staff, Madam President. So you guys are doing a wonderful job, continue the good work. On behalf of the minister and me, continue the good works. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** I have on this side, Madam President. Right? Just to my extreme, Madam

President, we have the Chairman and the CEO of the Grenada Cultural Foundation. Thank you for coming. **(Applause)** I hope I shed some light on some of the achievements and so on that you all have.

Last, but certainly not least, Madam President, I don't think I would need more than 15 more minutes **(laughter)**, that's within the time I'm sticking to.

Madam President: Repeat yourself, please.

Sen. the Hon. Quinc Britton: Madam President, I was saying, looking at a time, I don't think I would need more than 15 more minutes, and that is within my time, my allotted time based on my records.

Madam President: Yes, you are within your 10 minutes.

Sen. the Hon. Quinc Britton: You have to commend me. **(Laughter)** I'm sticking to the rules. Madam President, I move on to the Division of Culture, Madam President, and with us, we have the Chief Cultural Officer. He is sitting right there in the gallery. 2024, Madam President, marked a transformative year for the Division of Culture within impactful initiatives. The division played a critical role in the 50th Independence Day celebration, showcasing Grenada's rich cultural heritage. Some other accomplishments include supporting various cultural programmes, reintroducing the Grenada Arts Festival and signing of significant bilateral agreements to strengthen international cultural cooperation.

Firstly, the 50th Celebration. I don't know if your memory serves you right, Madam President, but it was not too long ago, just about a year ago, we had a mass choir with over 30 students participating, showcasing Grenada's musical talent and unity. That, Madam President, was thrilling. You know, just hearing those lovely voices being harmonised. The mass movement, where you have more than 400 members, including dancers and school children, took part in a large-scale performance as never witnessed

before, emphasising national pride and cultural expression. The Independence Calypso Competition. Celebrating Grenada's music and artistry through a national competition to foster pride in Grenadian culture.

Secondly, Madam President, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. Signed with the Ministry of Culture of Cuba to strengthen Grenada's cultural capacity. This MoU will facilitate training and cultural exchanges between the two countries, providing valuable opportunities for Grenadians to learn and grow in the arts. I think you probably missed a little trip, Madam President, when we made our visit to Cuba to see some of the culture and so on. The cultural expression and so on, that was to behold, Madam President. It was good. It was excellent.

So now that we have that MoU signed, I really would like to see us making those kinds of exchanges, with us showcasing the talent that we have, as well as they coming and showcasing what they have to offer.

Collaboration with the People's Republic of China. We worked in partnership with the Chinese Embassy to host the Wu Opera Troupe in two performances on November 9 and 10, and the Gateway Assembly. The performances showcased their richness in Chinese opera, fostering cultural diplomacy across cultural understanding between Grenada and China.

The Festival of the Arts 2024. In 2024, Madam President, we witnessed a highly anticipated return of the Festival of the Arts, a vibrant celebration of Grenadian creativity bringing together schools and community groups showcasing their talents across various artistic disciplines, including song, dance, coral speaking and music. The festival was held in two phases from April to May and from October to November. Over 30 primary schools and 13 secondary schools with three community groups registered, but with 26 of those schools ultimately participating, Madam President.

The event climaxed with a "Winners in Concert" featuring the outstanding performances from the winners in the various categories before a full audience at the Trade Centre. Cash prices were offered to participating schools, and a token of appreciation would be given to the teachers who dedicated their time and effort to

preparing the students for the competition.

This was made possible through corporate sponsorship, and permit me to acknowledge some, I would start from the bottom up: Flow Grenada, Six Sense, La Sagesse, George F. Huggins, Independence Agencies, Blue Bubbles Event and Rentals, and the Investment Migration Agency.

The reason why I left the Investment Migration Agency for last Madam President… So we see even if… Whatever we get from the Citizen by Investment Programme, we are investing it back into our economy. We're invested in our youth. I've seen them participating, Madam President, or sponsoring different events, over the past several months, which is commendable. **(Applause)**

They've also, Madam President, sponsored about four of our steel bands here in Grenada. The three which were unsponsored and they obtained some level of sponsorship, Madam President, and that is highly commendable, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President: How does it relate to this budget? How does it relate to the 2025 budget?

Sen. the Hon. Quinc Britton: Yes, I'll tell you. It's still steel pan and culture, that's how it relates, Madam President. So moving on, Madam President. I have how many minutes more, Madam President, half an hour? **(Laughter)** So let me just move on quickly, Madam President.

What we have achieved so far in 2025. The Independence Monarch, where we had the… We changed the format of the Independence Monarch from just the Calypso Monarch to independence… Let's say the Independence Monarch Competition. That was because instead of using the genre of just calypso, you could have sung or come up with a composition that we consider groovy, like how you have Blaka Dan with his groovy, once it's relatable to the team or the celebration. So the first person who was crowned was a female by the name of Jermaine Simon.

We also collaborated with the People's Republic of China in hosting them at another event, Madam President, where we celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the Resumption of Diplomatic Ties between Grenada and China. A special concert was held in St. Patrick, featuring a Ningbo visiting troop from China. A lot of local people attended, and so on.

We at the Division of Culture, Madam President, believe in recognising our icons and so on, giving them the flowers while they are still alive, so we hosted a tribute concert to Ms. Shirley Robinson. The Division hosted a tribute concert called Iconic Moves and Melody that was very amazing, Madam President. In collaboration with the National Folk Group, we honoured Ms. Shirley Robinson. She was a former Chief Cultural Officer and founder of the National Folk Group, Madam President. So a full concert was held, attracting a full audience at the Grenada Trade Centre, where we celebrated her. She was also very interactive with it. She also gave a performance. She had a piece that she did, a performance piece, which was very, very remarkable, Madam President.

Transitioning of the National Folk Group into the Grenada Performing Company, which, Madam President, is highly commendable. To further support the work of the National Folk Group and train a cadre of persons to be experts in the various skill sets. In the performing arts, the ministry has now registered the group as the Grenada National Performing Company. This significant move will elevate the profile of the group, attracting younger talents for sustainability and allowing for greater visibility and opportunity to showcase Grenada's cultural heritage, both on the national and international stage.

Madam President, let me just quickly move on. A culture docuseries, Madam President. We will work closely in collaboration with GIS, looking into programmes and so on, for the country. This initiative, facilitated by GIS, will provide an inside look into the programmes and contributions of division officers, fostering a deeper connection with the public, so people will know what it is that we are doing there, together with GIS.

A cultural delegation to Japan Expo 2025 from April 17 to 22, Madam President, Grenada, we will be sending a cultural group to the World Expo in Japan. Madam

President, this event will serve as an impactful platform for Grenada to showcase its rich cultural heritage.

Consultation for the Arts Festival for 2026, because we've decided to do it biannually, until we grow the capacity so that we can make it an annual event, Madam President. So we will review all the challenges that we had and look at ways we can improve so that we can get the best of Grenadian talent and showcase, Madam President.

Building more capacity. The division is focused on building capacity for the reintroduction of programmes in schools across the length and breadth of our tri-island state, Madam President, with the emphasis on voice, dance, steel pan and calypso, employing more cultural officers who will work and support the programmes from the ministry and empower young people with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the arts, Madam President.

The procurement of steelpan and the development of steelpan ensembles. Madam President, the ministry will procure 100 pieces of steel pans to create seven steelpan ensembles across communities and schools throughout the length and breadth of Grenada, Madam President.

This is an initiative that I highly, highly commend, Madam President, because running or operating a steel band is not cheap hence the reason why I commended the Investment Migration Agency, Madam President, by them taking up the initiative to sponsor a more initiatives to let our bands function to its fullest capacity, because it's not easy to maintain a steel band, Madam President. So that's the correlation, Madam President. I hope I provided some explanation.

Madam President, support for the School Music Programmes. The Division will continue to support the school music lab with new additions like music production and training. We also organise events such as the National School Orchestra Showcase, the Peter Phillip Drum Corps Competition among schools, the Take It To The Street Dance Competition, and the Camerhogne Folk Festival.

These programmes and events will foster the creativity, discipline and teamwork

amongst students and community groups, giving them the opportunity to showcase their talents while preserving Grenada's rich cultural heritage.

And lastly, Madam President, we are preserving our cultural heritage. Madam President, it's an effort where we look at our rich cultural history, as part of our treasured history, and so on, Madam President, our traditions, recognising, preserving, for future generations to come. Madam President, we would undertake some in 2025, some bold initiatives:

- The establishment of the National Heroes Park;
- The establishment of the PRA Monument;
- The establishment of Fort George as a National Heritage Site;
- Rationalised Grenada's national holidays;
- Harmonise legislative framework for preservation and management of Grenada's cultural heritage;
- Naming and renaming of public streets and buildings;
- Development of Grenada's national identity and values; and
- Create a database for tangible and intangible cultural assets.

Madam President, as I wrap up because I realised time is on me, I just want to record my unequivocal support, Madam President, for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, and thank the staff from the ministry as well as all the statutory bodies, and some of who are present that I recognise my family, my friends my lovely constituents, thank you very much for coming.

To you and the staff, Madam President, I wish that I had more time, I could delve in a lot more on the police since I recognise their important role in protecting and serving. Thank you very much for your contribution. And finally, the police in Victoria Police Station, Madam President, they are working under some extreme conditions, some of which we met, and we are moving steadfastly to address that situation. We have already identified a building, the Victoria Hotel, where we are going to retrofit and so on to accommodate them.

So thank you very much, Madam President. I didn't expect I would have stayed

such a long time, so please forgive me for the extra minute or two that I spent. So thank you very much. **(Applause)**

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Britton. Thank you very much. Your passion for St. Mark doesn't feed you. I want to congratulate your ministry on all that you have reported and its outlook for the future. I want to thank the Minister for Economic Development and the Creative Economy as he exits our Chamber, thank him for the work he's done last year and for what is to come this year. Thanks to your constituents, the ordinary people of our country, St. Mark, for coming down, and to thank all the public workers in the ministry. Thank you, ladies, for spending the day with us. I think I've seen you during the lunch hour.

Thanks to the chair of the Grenada Cultural Foundation, Mr. Christopher DeRiggs, and forgive me for starting to call names because I don't know the person next to you. **(Laughter)** I can't recall, but thank you both for being here and for guiding cultural understanding and activities in the country over the past year. We want a more rigorous programme coming up in 2025, 2026 was touched on, even for the Festival of the Arts. We look forward to that. Thank you all very much. Thank you.

And I think we have one hour to spend listening to the spokesperson, Representative for the Farmers and Fishers of this country. He's a man who hails from St. Andrew. Maybe he has the same experience as Senator Britton. He was bright, but talks too much. **(Laughter)** But look… But look at where it brought him. So you have the floor, sir, for your presentation. Delighted to have you. Thank you, Senator St. Clair.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: Thank you, Madam President. Well, I don't know, maybe it's a blessing. I don't know. **(Laughter)** All right. So, thank you very much, Madam President, for having me take the floor this time. And, of course, I stand in the name of the Farmers and Fisherfolk of this country, whose interests I speak on in this House.

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Senator the Honourable Roderick St. Clair

I rise, Madam President, to speak towards the 2025 Budget, and, of course, it's an Estimate of Revenues and Expenditure, the word "Estimates", but, of course, as I always say, it's more than just the numbers. It is the activities which would cause the numbers to be involved, whether it's expense, whether it's revenue or an income, well, revenue in this case. So I rise to speak on that.

The theme, of course, that was presented to us, the nation, by the Minister for Finance a few weeks ago says, "Towards Vision 75: Grenada—Resilient and Rising". Of course, we could understand the resilience of this country having gone through many different things, whether it's climatic issues, social issues, or political issues. In all cases, Grenada is still there, you know. The people are still present. The institutions are there. New people are coming, and we are growing. So this is important, and as that happens, we say, we're rising. So at the end of the day, the theme itself, in context, is an aspiring theme, and it's one to work towards, and that's the thing about themes and missions and visions. It's simple and clear. Sometimes you get those long, long unwinding ones that we forget. We have to read it again. So I say this to lay context for the record in my presentation. Of course, the details of the budget and all those things were presented by the minister, in various ways, by the "Other Place", and of course, here our Senators on the "Government Side" would explain.

My job is to do a critique, a review, and observations, suggestions, recommendations, commendations, but at the same time, if I spend too much time commending, then I don't get extra minutes, so I leave this to the presenter of the Bill and the presenters to do such. Right, because I wouldn't get bonus time for that. So I'm negotiating. Okay? So that's the opening.

I want to start, Madam President, with just a few minutes to make some brief comments on some of the presentations from this morning. I think it's important. For example, the most important presentation was by the Leader of the Government's Business. I wanted to just make a few comments pertaining to that.

Of course, of interest in his presentation, the issue of the MNIB and privatising and where it's going and, of course, farmers are anxious, wanting to know, where are we. Of

course, we are still not hearing… We are hearing that something is happening, but we don't know what is happening, and maybe, I guess, there is no information about what is happening, so we just have to wait until whatever is happening is announced. I understand that you can really say too much if you don't have the information, but we know something is supposed to happen.

What we know is that to plan is very important, and so what we don't want is that this new system is set up on and our farmers are not ready to produce and three, four months going and they say, "Well, farmers not producing. They aren't ready as yet. We better import our products", but we didn't get chance to plan is not like even building a car or making a block. Fruits, vegetables, and other crops take four weeks, five weeks, and six weeks.

So the message to my friends on the "Other Side" is to make sure that our farmers get early notice and early warning to start preparing for the market, you know, and as I quip to my friend Senator Rahaman earlier on, speaking about agriculture is about management. Of course, he mentioned a long list of what to plant, where to plant, and when to plant. In his whole speech, he forgot to mention the market. He said, "I forgot to mention it". This is the most important thing.

Without markets, nobody produces. There is no money. There is no possibility of income. There is no possibility of finance, and so it's all about the market, that's what gives farmers confidence, that's what makes a man buy a bus, that's what makes somebody open a restaurant, buy a sewing machine, buy a boots or a cutlass to go on the farm. It's about the market, so let us not lose sight of that, and once you have the market and you have money, you could then hire people to manage the business for you, you know. So… Or go to the bank and get more money. So this is one part.

The other important point that was raised is the issue of the constituency office and the vehicles, and even more money for them. I fully support that. In fact, I'm a main supporter of local government. I find… I trust that the constituency office doesn't segue into a loss of emphasis on the issue of local government.

In fact, my dear friend and former Member of the Lower House and Attorney General, Francis Alexis, whom I met many years ago when I was a teacher, went around the country educating people about this. At that time, he was the Minister for Labour and Local Government, and I challenged him then on a lot of things, because, you know, I like to debate. **(Laughter)**

The joke is, Madam President, a few weeks afterwards, he sent a vehicle from the Ministry of Labour and Local Government with a big envelope, with all the bills and all that stuff. He said, "Go and read that if you know about local government, and so on. I'm not too sure if he remembers that, and since then, we have become very good friends.

So I say this to say that my interest in local government is serious and not about now, it's about the last how many years, about this matter. So I trust that we don't lose sight of local government in that line, but I also endorse that we need to get some more funds for the offices and that they are used wisely and for productive purposes, and for many outreach and so on, and it can be equipped in different ways. So I like the idea.

The issue of the Beryl Income Support for the Farmers. Well, that I would raise again, but of course, we have over 4,000 farmers benefitting, almost 300 fisherfolk, of course, we urge them, as I myself was directly involved in a lot of these discussions with the Minister for Agriculture, from almost day one on this matter, based on where I sit. We worked together on many things, and of course, we trust that the farmers have used the funds wisely in many ways.

Because, whilst yes, we'll want them to use it to go back to the land, you know, if you are affected, your house is affected, you don't have food at the time, or you need medication, of course, some of these funds will definitely go there. But we know that farmers know how to run their business. They know how to run their homes. They buy big vehicles. They build big houses. They send their children to school, and they make decisions so we would see the result of their efforts over the next, I will say, a year, because as we said, you have to produce. We'll speak more about that in terms of how they may have used their money and the results, if they had any impediments. We continue to be grateful.

And, of course, I don't think I've heard that anywhere but of course, we also from the cocoa and the nutmeg sector, in particular, want to, not only thank the Government for their previous contribution towards the Crop Insurance, but their pledge for the 2025 season is also covered, and we urge our farmers, not only cocoa and nutmeg, but they can also purchase as much as possible, the insurance, for the coverage. The High Commissioner, Representative for the UK and I pledged to work together to do some promotion and media appearances to get people to sign up at the Credit Union League so they can purchase these things. So, these are very important points I want to connect while it's early, so I can buy some time.

As we go further, I think Senator Rahaman raised it, and it's worth noting the issue about financing of the budget, but it sort of got me interested, Madam President, because when I looked at the excess if… **(Laughter)** Well, it's Senator Rahaman saying that… This EC$283 million would fund the budget. The question we could ask for clarity is this: Is this money really sitting there to finance the budget, or is it going to really be as fast as the money is rolling into the cash flow purposes, so it can fund costs that would emerge during the year? So that is an important question… Whether that money is sitting somewhere or whether it's rolling, I have my thoughts, but they might be another way it might be sitting there, you know.

This takes me to the issue of the hospital being raised, and this partnership with the Mount Sinai, and so on. All of those things are important because there are many different cries in different ways about our services in the hospital, the equipment and so on, notwithstanding the efforts of everyone. So we must not run away, and I think this is a bold acceptance that we need to do something.

Of course, this can't be delayed. It's a major project. It wouldn't happen in one year unless you're bringing maybe 1000 or 2000 people, who are working day and night. We're not saying that day and night is not possible, but the number of people needed to do this work is. But we know that just designing and quantity surveying and all of those things take time, so we shouldn't in any way try to leave some fast expectations in people, and then it takes a long time to happen. So we should say okay, the design will happen

in the first year. So be very clear on what we expect to see; in year two, we will see this, in year three, we will see that. So I think you'll be very important, Madam President, to see some sort of project framework in our summary way as to what this thing is going to plan out to, because we're speaking about hundreds and millions of dollars about something that we should be able to see what the end product would look like.

The issue of skills. I think this is very important, and we have spoken about it a lot, you know, TAMCC as a community college in particular, the training agency and so on, they need to really collaborate and connect to supply proper labour for all our workforce.

Not because some of the folks are currently working and employed, that doesn't mean they can't learn new skills to be more productive and more efficient with new technologies. So I don't want us to leave here, well, you know, everybody working, they're good, but can they do more, do they want some other capacity building? It is new technology, or new type of material that the importers and the business people may want to bring in but, you know, those workers down in Grenada don't know how to use these type of tiles, they don't know how to set up these types of equipment, so then all that's supposed to be good, we don't maximise the benefits. So the issue of retooling, retraining and upgrading is very important. I don't want us to lose sight of that, please.

And, of course, those who are not employed or not doing anything, we need to find them. We passed a Bill here some years ago, about last year, saying that you have to be 17 or 18 years, I think 21 years, and you have to be in school still. So where are these persons? Has the Ministry of Education found 20 persons, 40 persons who really should be in school, but are not in school? Where is the report card on that, and how do we add teeth to that for the nation building and rising and all of those things that we want to do? So we can't just pass the regulations and then we don't do anything.

Madam President, the other point I want to get at is the Renewable Energy issue. I think it's very important, and we see the private sector is providing a lot of technology. People are going online and so on, but I think again, the technician, the technical persons should be able to help some of these homeowners and so on. The business people might

be able to do it, and hire some of the more skilled guys, and there are even very few of them.

So, I think that, for example, I know the Ozone Unit, for example, my friend Mr. Smith and those guys back then, trained a lot of people to deal with managing this gas, and we're using that in terms of they have a model that they have used to unleash the skills. Maybe we need to find a way to use a similar approach to unleash that sort of skillset with wider workforces to be able to implement a lot of these renewable energy technologies. I think this is important. I speak to a lot of them, people who're doing certain things right now, and it's like they're not sure, they have to research that, so it means that we have issues, and they may set up technologies that may eventually cause harm to people's equipment and so on. So, I think it's a wise suggestion to be taken on board.

The linkage with tourism and so on… I spoke about that this morning. Of course, we have to do more of that, and I think my good friend, Senator Britton, spoke to the culture and all that. He spoke about gastronomy.

Building those connections with agriculture is crucial because the more people go out, the more they spend. They're not just drinking rum and beer. They also need food. When they get a little bit tipsy, they want food. You know? So where is this food? Where are these special chips? Are there special drinks, special soups, and so on?

So I think they need to be connected, and of course, I know he's well placed, you know, the Food Festival in Victoria is a very nice one. I've been there a few times. It's one of my favourites, so I think that there is a connection there, but at the same time, speaking even from personal experience from the GCNA and the close working relationship with the Board of Tourism…

Actually, right now, this evening, 3:00 p.m., we, in collaboration with the Board of Tourism at the Mount Cinnamon Hotel, are launching a special syrup that can be used to make cocktails, where the bartenders can mix cocktails and so on with an international mixologist. It is a partnership among ourselves doing that, using a spice cocktail mixture and so on.

So I'm saying that I understand the link and how we could bring it stronger. It's not just going and watching a tree on the sand and the sun, but they are different ways we can make those sorts of connections and the issue of increasing the amount of funds for those local tourism community projects. We need to do more of that, more of that, and we need to work with our taxi men and so on. But at the same time, we definitely need to spend more time having the appropriate language, whether it's sign languages or different types of languages.

I'm not creating a promotion, but at the GCNA, we have a museum in Beaulieu, and we have four language interpretations: English, Spanish, French, and German. So even if my staff can only speak English, mostly, if a Spanish person came, the little that they can say to them, they can read the interpretation and so, but if we can train our persons in the language, different languages, Chinese et cetera, then that will be very helpful to add to this whole product. So I'm saying we need more attractions, and all of those things are spoken about, but we have to have the backend serviced to that.

As we go down, the issue of CCC cameras that was mentioned, of course, we welcome that because we know it will help us greatly with the issue of praedial larceny. In fact, a few months ago, we had some situation up in my area and we were able to intervene with the Commissioner and of course, they did what they had to do with certain technologies and of course, we know that we can do that in a broader space, not only by the bus stop and in sports places and so on, but we know where they can go so that at least you could see something and monitor certain practices.

Interestingly, Madam President, the issue of the Minimum Wage Bill was raised. Of course, when I say was raised, not hiked, but it was mentioned that this needed to be revisited more regularly. In fact, the Leader of Government's Business said that it should be revisited about every five years, and I said, "But hold on, that's a nice suggestion, but the Crop Compensation, which we're asking to put a time frame for review, that hasn't been reviewed since in 1995. We seemed to be mute on that one". It begs the question, whether or not…

I heard Senator Cox was asking, "How am I looking at my glasses. Only looking, looking"? Maybe I have the wrong glasses on because that's a clear one that needs some action, but we seem to be happy that we need to do it five years later because we just did it.

And then my good friend, Senator Thomas, who… I like her… I like her presentation all the time because the topics that she raised are so in the fabric of the country, you know, it's very in the fabric. But she mentioned the Probation Act, which was reviewed sometime in 1960, and I said to myself, "Good luck, because if 1995 can get touched, I don't know how 1960 would get touched". So my friend, I trust that you can bargain for the two of us when you're getting through. Because it's an important point that the Senator is making, but at the same time, what's happening to the farmers? We seem to be mute on that legislative agenda there, so I don't know if I could check it or I could "X" it; one of them have to take place. In school, put an "X" when it's wrong or a tick when it's correct.

The issue of the procurement and disposal of the vehicles, but I think what was raised by the Leader of Government's Business was specifically the issue of the use, how the vehicle is abused, and that is an issue. We need to do better than that.

So, Madam President, I will try to do about maybe two minutes quickly before I shift here… The disability issue and so on, with reference to the vehicles and buildings. All these are very good initiatives and so on. The issue of the population capacity, all of those are very good, very, very, good initiatives. The community development initiative is something that I endorsed, but we need to make sure that the issue of the Home Economics, the Homemakers Club, and all of those things, Agriculture, little backyard gardening… So you're building all of these other components in it so that we can add more value to those initiatives; these are some comments I wanted to make regarding this.

As I move, Madam President, to look specifically now, outside of the linkages that I raised, the issue of the Ministry of Agriculture portfolio in this budget. See… It's a good thing I don't use technology, my computer is saying how it's cleaning something. You

see? It's a good thing I have paper.

So we have a budget for the year, and Agriculture is in the region of just about EC$32 million. Of course, Fisheries was removed from it and joined up with Marine, which goes up to something about EC$6 million. So, pretty much, it's just about the same as last year.

Structurally, with the Fisheries component, if I may say, Madam President, Fisheries and the Marine Resources, by and large, most of the activities that are highlighted to be completed in 2025, are basically the list of activities from 2024, where nothing was really done. When you look at it, for example… Some of it, Senator Cox raised, you know, the sargassum, zero money spent. I'm saying, it could be an error because sometimes when you're doing these documents, certain things get missed. So, I say, maybe it's an error, but nothing has happened in the sargassum.

I am dealing with the Fisheries Marine part. I was surprised that just about… I think about EC$500,000 was budgeted for the upgrade of the fish markets, and only about EC$99,000 was spent when I looked at the capital budget on the fish markets. So, what I found was… We could've done more. I mean, my good friend in Victoria, we know the issues with the Victoria Fish Market, we know the issue of ice, and so on, that had me a little bit worried.

Of course, I know some of the maintenance issues, issues of the [3]MPA Management, I see those are better included and catered for in this marine resource component of the budget. That wasn't really there before, and so the management of the Marine Protected Areas was basically a problem because they were nobody, even if they had a boat; nothing really was going on, particularly with those in Grenada. I think the one in Carriacou is a model management approach, but the one here had some issues.

So… If I just look at that quickly, Madam President, so I can get this part out of the way with the marine affairs. Yes. So the sargassum, the fish market, and the marine protected areas are the areas we have EC$300,000 budgeted for this year, and I hope

[3] Marine Protected Areas

we can spend everything.

- Marine Protected Areas – EC$1.3 million;
- The Sargassum – EC$350,000; and
- The Blue Economy – EC$100,000.

And I take the Blue Economy to mean, when I look at the mandate, it's to sort of raise project funds and so on, such that we can find better opportunities and look at the whole issue of linking back with tourism and other types of benefits. So that's okay, you know, that's not a problem. But those that we are supposed to do the last time, you know, we're hurting, and we need to have some action.

You can't put money aside, you have excess to go over into the next year, and of course, it's not done; the question is, do you have the number of people to get it done? And when you look, Madam President, at some of the issues, you're seeing 10 vacancies, 11 vacancies, in some of those ministries and… then… I can't recall seeing advertisements. At least if we want to say they're nobody for the jobs, but where are the ads? It's not costing us much to put an ad out; you can put it on Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, or GIS. Where are the ads that are really advertising those positions? And if nobody applied, then nobody applied, but the issue of putting the jobs out, the vacancies…

So, for example, in the Ministry of Agriculture alone, we have about 129 vacancies, out of that you have about 40 something in Extension, about 16 in Agronomy, when you add it up between Agronomy, Extension and I think it's Forestry or one of them, you end up with almost about 60, and these are like the nuts and bolts of the Ministry of Agriculture to service the farmers. So let us take a closer look at this thing, Madam President. Let's take a look. Let's take a look.

The Ministry of Agriculture for this year said to us that the mission, that is what they want to accomplish, is very instructive, as we want to rise and become resilient. "To facilitate food and nutrition security. To increase economic returns from the agriculture sector by promoting sustainable use of natural resources and providing quality services".

So if we stick to the issue of food security, which is the real issue, the question arises, what are you doing, how are you equipped to give food security?

And then I go and I look at the capital component, and if you look at the recurrent expenditure, we already have a problem, because we have a series of vacancies that we're not filling, so the services must be short. If you're short three persons, four persons, five persons, then you're doubling up, so some persons will be missed in a service that they want to give, not that you don't want to give it, but you're just not set up to give it. So I think a major effort of the ministry is to find these people; the issue is not the budget because it's well allocated in terms of the estimates. It's just that we need to find the people. So that's the first part. Right?

The second part relates to the capital component, and if you take a quick look, I capture some of it. We spoke about the multiple purposes, the agro-processing plant, and this is good. I have always spoked about something like that because our agro-processors do need some facility, to prepare their products, while some of them might do it at their home, and the kitchen might be clean and all of those things, if it can be done in a in a central place where you have proper equipment, proper tools, proper persons to prepare the products…

My good friend, for example, Senator Rahaman, could have a formula to make something, and he just presents it to them, and they charge him a fee to package, prepare, and label it, so then all he does is pay them and then collect some money when he sells it.

So it's not just about agro processors coming their physically and get service done, but other people who want to do things may not necessarily have to have a facility, but it can be used, and then integration with the Produce Chemist Lab and so on, all the testing can be properly done and certified, such that is produced in, what they'll call, like, a food safe or a [4]HACCP friendly environment, and you could be able to access markets. So this we fully endorse, but we can't take too long, Madam President. I don't know about

[4] Hazzard Analysis Critical Control Point

you, but sometimes I used to be baking bread, and when the bread takes a long time to rise, you know what happened? **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Well, I think that's an experiment everybody needs to try.

In that regard, the issue of research, and I would just link it quickly. We see about EC$500,000 budgeted for research; this is really good. I remember there was a research director, Doctor Dottin, who was there, and after he left, it was blank and not to show if there's a Director of Research, but it's good that it's budgeted. We need to put a team together that will look at the research, and I think that this EC$500,000 should not just be researched for someone sitting in the Ministry of Agriculture. It's national research.

Meaning that. Let's suppose you have a school, a little science club, or some other organisation wanting to do a research, they should be able to access—if you say EC$20,000 or EC$10,000 with a small proposal so that they can be able to do some of the research that is in line to where we want to go, so that you're able to get more implementation, execution and more buy-in, you know. So this is what I want to suggest.

These things should not be sitting there, and two people didn't do some work in the ministry, so then next year we see just EC$75,000 used, and the next year, now, what happens, it goes down to EC$50,000 because that's what they normally do. If you can't handle EC$500,000 and it is EC$75,000 you can spend, we will give you EC$50,000 next time because we know that it is what you can handle; but if we use that sort of approach, I think we will get more, particularly for research.

The other area that we need to look at is the issue of the land bank, and this is a project I know that is on stream. I know there are a lot of young people who already have assigned lands and so on. And I know they're private persons who want to get involved in the land bank process, so I think this is an important issue. A lot of farmers, some of them have family lands, they're not settled, they want lands that they could have less stress and encumbrance around, not necessarily to buy, but at least to lease and to have access to. And so the longer we take with this, Madam President, the longer we are endangering our whole food security, and this is my concern in this process.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Roderick St. Clair

Just looking for something… Okay. The other issue that we have here is the… Wow. I didn't want to get there, but it popped up: Praedial larceny, Madam President. Praedial larceny. We see that it is increasing to EC$500,000. Last year EC$150,000 was spent… Sorry, it was allocated. EC$127,000. What exactly was that money used to do? I don't know, maybe cameras, maybe a few things, but EC$500,000 for capital budget sounds good.

I trust that we spend it. I trust that we spend it, because if we don't spend it, all we are doing is making our farmers suffer. It may not solve all the problems, but it may just reduce the whole problem by a certain percentage. And so, I know Inspector Daniel very well. We have a good connection for discussion, and I trust that he will get active to be able to use this money.

In fact, Madam President, I want to appeal to my friends on the "Other Side", that unless the Cabinet's Conclusion was rescinded sometime back in around 2010 or 2009, there was a Praedial Larceny Advisory Committee, which was inter-sectoral and provided oversight support to the whole issue of the effort of praedial larceny. Can someone go back to look and see if the Cabinet's Conclusion was rescinded, and if it wasn't rescinded, the question is, in the whole issue of transformation, what was not transformed, transform it and let's get going again. Because when that was working, praedial larceny efforts were good.

I'm not saying that for saying it sake, because I happened to be the Chair of that committee for several years. The Commissioner of Police, all of them were involved. The last meeting was held sometime around 2019, with the Deputy Commissioner, I'm not too sure if he is still there, Prince, and so on. So they know very well about all of these things. You have the supermarkets involved; cocoa, nutmeg, other farmers, the ministry was involved and if you look at the Praedial Larcency Act, it caters to all of those committees, but, this advisory body, now, with stakeholders provided more support and oversight so in the issue of transparency and accountability, I think that we need to recall that and have it on the books, have it reinstated as soon as possible. Those things to me can happen with the stroke of a pen. That is not a long, difficult thing to take place.

And you realise I keep my praedial larceny issues very small. I think the present Commissioner, my good friend, understands with the response I've seen from him so far, and we want to move forward regarding praedial larceny. Of course, the legislation leaves room for the registration of vendors and farmers. I see in the work plan the show about the registration of farmers and vendors. So at some point, we would want to find out from our good friends through the question, how many were registered when? So I'm saying start preparing the answers as of now.

Madam President, the issue of youth in Agriculture seems to be going okay, but interestingly, there is a project called Climate Resilience Agriculture Integrated Landscape. That is a very big project—not one cent was spent on that. And I see them; the vehicles are driving up and down, and they are getting paid every day, but I think it's an error; it could never be zero. But we are going to ask a question at some stage to find out how much money was really spent, maybe it's zero, but it's showing zero.

So we cannot afford to have all these funds coming in, and these are not local funds, and we are not using them. Senator Cox spoke about the same with the Food Security Project, EC$9 million, and only a few hundred thousand dollars were used. And, the interest that my good friend Senator Rahaman spoke about this morning, is tied up in that because once you draw down the money… If you are building a house and you take a loan for EC$10 million, the moment the banker cuts the cheque, the interest starts to run whether or not you start building or not. So we have to be smarter than that. I am not saying the ministers, but our administrators have to act prudently, our accounting officers and so on have to save us money.

The census is going to see… The Census Data seems to be up and running, and it's ready, so we should see our census report soon, because the agriculture census is very important, Madam President, for planners, for investors, for direction and decision-making. I mean, to operate without an agriculture census, it's like driving a vehicle and not even having a gas gauge. Well, I can't even describe it. It's a big risk, because you could be speaking to donors, you could be doing all sorts of stuff without understanding what is happening, and so, finally, it's available and it must be published and be easily

accessible, which normally used to be the case, such that we could able to make decisions.

I see Agriculture Information Enhancement, EC$50,000, and the whole issue of data is important for Estimates for 2025, but in 2024, there was EC$200,000 and only EC$72,000 was spent. I don't know if that was sufficient to accomplish the task or if the task is unfinished. So these are the questions we would have to find out because speaking about those things here, sometimes the presenters of this information don't have the background details, and I think this is the disadvantage, so we'd have to have some questions coming and that, Madam President.

There's another big one the Government Estates, and I'm a believer that we have to use the Government Estates as a strategic tool to produce food, it is one of the area that Government uses to produce food **(applause)**, produce whether it is livestock or whatever it is because you can do all the experiments, you can mass produce and you can… This is a very… All your research… The question is, are we really doing enough? There is some, but are we doing enough?

I remember as a little boy, Bellevue Estate and all of those estates, what was going on. And Bellevue Estate, why is it not mentioned here? We need to find a way to get it back. We have got many things in Grenada. We have legally found ways to get it back, and we need to get Bellevue Estate back because it's just there, sitting in the bush. I mean, it's a community that's where I grew up, and I think that this service we are doing to ourselves is to let that place just fall down.

I mean, we cannot afford to be sitting back with our hands behind our backs because of some legal entanglement. All legal matters can be resolved. We have very bright lawyers in this country who have tried big cases and have been able to be successful, whether through arbitration or negotiation, as the case may be, because it's our asset. It wasn't sold. It was leased; it was best that we sell it. It would have been easy to get it back because we had sold things, and we got it back much more easily. I'm just saying the facts.

The issue of the farm roads, Madam President. I mean that one was… I laughed because you saw the report form today, the Fiscal Mid-Term Report? One of the major areas has to do with farm roads. We had EC$1 million earmarked for last year to spend on farm roads. Only EC$312,000 were spent. We would like to know which roads. I don't want to know the cost of each road, but which roads are really fixed?

I mean, we're not talking about pitching and concreting roads; we're just grading the roads so that the farmers can have access. We only spent three hundred and something thousand. Is it that we don't have capacity, or is it that we don't know the roads to go and fix, or we didn't really fix the roads? We would like to get some explanation on that because that's one of the biggest issues for us.

In fact, the three biggest issues in Agriculture from our crop standpoint are roads, labour and praedial larceny, and I am not even dealing with the cost of goods or cost of material, that's a different discussion, and if this number one is not touched, I am wondering.

You know what is interesting, Madam President? When I look at the extension activity, Ministry of Agriculture Extension Activity, it mentions that farm roads are a key activity for 2025, so I smile and I say, "Great, well, you know, I have to read". So I then go over to the Capital Expenditure area and I realised for the next three years, 2025, 2026, 2027, again, I think it's an error 0, 0, 0. I think there is an error. It could never be, because you didn't spend all, and that is why I concluded maybe they don't know which roads need to be fixed. So… If I don't know which roads, watch, don't put anything to be safe, because we don't know which roads. But we know the roads, a lot of roads. If we are on the ground with the farmers in the community, we know those roads. So I am saying to us, we need to put back the EC$1 million, and we can work together and share the roads with you.

In fact, Madam President, if I may go there because sometimes we don't want to go there, but I'm on the side of going there. **(Laughter)** If I may go there. The GCNA, because of this frustration, has recently engaged some of the heavy equipment operators like Kenny's Trucking, Claudius Pierre, Herry and others to provide what they call a sort

of pro bono service with some intervention from us and some collaboration from petrol companies to be able to address some of these roads.

In fact, they already pledged, in all cases, to do two roads, which are already identified, and they will help to do the grading and back-filling, so that farmers can get to their nutmeg and cocoa land. This we have to do. And that, I'm sure, wouldn't cost even if we had to put a little money, EC$50,000. So, what have we done with the EC$375,000? What have we done with the remaining seven hundred and something thousand? So that's what I'm saying, let's put it back, let's work together and let's do more roads. This is not a difficult ask, so farmers can have a better day and be able to access the land, notwithstanding all the challenges that they have been having.

Madam President, as I go further down, I see the issue of the Soil Lab and all of those things are coming back, and so on, with the Tissue Culture Lab. Those are important supports that the farmers need, but when you look at the poultry industry, you know, I recognised EC$2 million was allocated last year, and that was from the same Food Security World Bank project. You had just about EC$800,000 spent, and the rest remaining, and I see EC$1 million in 2025.

But my appeal on the poultry issue is that the feed is a big issue, and that was raised when you look at all the presentations in the past on poultry. Like agriculture, where you have some intervention with the fertiliser, you have the buses getting some concessions. I believe that Government need to find, as was said by Leader Government's Business in last year's presentation we need to look and find our way to find out what is that price at which we can get our local consumers to buy the local meats, and provide them with some sort offset on the price of the feed, such that in partnership with the supermarkets and so on for the main commercial producers we can be able to do something.

Poultry import is about EC$50, EC$60 million out of that EC$300 and something thousand dollars in a Food Import Bill. So, even if you spend EC$5 million and it could save EC$20 million, Senator Rahaman would tell you, to me, that this is a good return on investment, or it is a good morale boost for all of us. I don't think this is a very difficult

one. We are very bright people in the Ministry of Finance who could work out some modalities and find a way around that. This, I think, would make a big dent for us in this thing.

The issue of labour, Madam President, is a big concern, and when I look at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Export, the whole issue of free movement of people. They have made some progress. It is not finalised in terms of the movement of agricultural workers. I know Senator Rahaman spoke about some person he met who can intervene in terms of providing labour, seasonal labour, but our thing here in Grenada is not seasonal labour because agriculture is going on year-round. We are in a tropical climate, and so we need to find a way to move towards that because there are a lot of people who are interested, and we should find a modality, whether we need to have a consultation on the matter with the farming community, with the Ministry of Labour and find out and create some education in terms of that.

The issue on Carriacou, Madam President. I see a lot on the paper about what is happening, and some are unfinished, some are to be done. I'm not on the ground. I wouldn't say I know what is finished and what is unfinished, but it's good activities. Maybe, as Senator Cox said, some might be political and some may not be political, but for us in a sector, a farmer is a farmer, and so once they are benefiting to start with, then we go look and see if there are any injustices along the way, but so far they seem to be doing some work in that regard.

The issue on the Agronomy Division in the Ministry of Agriculture, Alice Neils and her team… They have a long list of things that they want to do, the propagation of the different plants and so on, specific work with propagating more nutmeg and cocoa and using the marcotting technologies, and so on. Those are very encouraging and promising, and so is the support. I see that for her and a team up in Mirabeau is good, but at the same time, she needs skilled people. They have to rehire a retired person to come and help with the marcotting and so on, but we need training, and that's the same point I raised earlier. So we need to have this thing done urgently, not wait for some programme three years down the road, and then nutmeg takes six to seven years to bear.

We may be shooting ourselves in the foot. Right?

So the Pest Management Unit again, again, I think there are some vacancies there, but we need to ensure that all the laboratory and testing abilities, very important, in the Pest Management Unit, because pests coming in and pests going out are very critical. I see they made some progress monitoring fruit fly, all of those things, so we do encourage them, but we know that they can do more if they get the support.

They ask for some legislative review, and I know that this legislative review that they speak about with the Plant Protection Act and all those things is something that has been on the table, maybe since Paul Graham was there, so that is way over 10, 15 years. I think that there's a call, and I think we have the ears of the Attorney General here, and the message can reach back to where it is supposed to reach in order to help with this matter.

Madam President, the issue of the 4H. I realise also that in this year's budget, the support for 4H and School Gardening was zero, whilst last year we had a little bit of money. I remember a teacher meeting me a few years ago saying, "Senator, make sure you raise the matter. We need some money in 4H." So if we want to get youth involved, and we want to get the young people involved, how could we remove the money there? Now, if it's reassigned to the Ministry of Education, we cannot 4H in Agriculture and the money sitting down in Education. There is no money.

So, I mean, I like the new programme and the new format for the budget. I think it's, in terms of the software layout, a lot more friendly than before. So I don't know if things get missed out, Madam President. So I really think that in the Ministry of Agriculture, in particular, they should take a look again and see how these figures are going to affect them, because when it comes time to spend, they will not be able to spend, and let's say come up with special warrants, et cetera.

So, the next question I ask is, I know that we are in March… We are speaking about a budget that is supposed to be for the year. Of course, we know money was spent because the Supplementary Budget was mainly a Capital Budget when we discussed the last year. So, whatever special warrants, et cetera… The question is, how much money

has been spent so far, and on what, in the new space of January to March? Because it wouldn't be that from April after this Bill has passed. You are starting up with this EC$1.9 billion spending, it's going retroactive from January, February, and March. So, how much have you spent? So we want to know how much you have remaining because the next thing is half of what was spent already. We don't know.

And that's what comes back to the point I've always raised since then. We need to really have a proper monitoring and evaluation of where we reach, even if we come up to a supplement, sometimes you end up with new items, but the old items, we don't know where they reach. If you go to the bank for money, when you go back and say you need to get some more, the bank says, "Well, hold on, let me see where you reach with the money you had the first time. You want more again? Okay. Well, we are giving you less". This, I think, is my concern.

Madam President, the issue of honey is a big issue. I know there was some activity done by the Government and Trinidad, and so on, particularly in Trinidad, where there were some discussions. But we cannot only have discussions, discussions, and they are friendly discussions because I look at the report again, the Medium-Term Report, showing that our honey production increased. Of course, we can look at value added and selling in the local market, but of course, it's always good when we export to help with the balance of trade. So, we need to really act aggressively.

The role of the embassies and so on. I think it's good. I mean, I personally have interactions with China, the Ministry of Trade, Cuba, former Senator Noel, my good friend, Ian Marshall in China, sending samples of different products and so on, and so we think this is good. But we hope that we can get some results from that at some point, and not just sending products for sending products' sake, but it's a good approach and a good idea. The receptions we have gotten so far have been good, not just with products of the GCNA, but general feedback from that type of initiative that they had been, so we welcome that.

The issue, Madam President, about the National Farmers Day is something that I really applaud and endorse, but I see we had about EC$500,000 last year, and now it's

down to EC$75,000 for this year. So I don't know if it's going to be a much scaled-down activity because EC$75,000 for National Farmers Day, really and truly, I'm sure by the time you get awards and this and that, it might be more money, but we look forward to that day.

The recommendation I want to throw out to the Minister for Agriculture, in that regard, I think if it's every quarter, you know, whilst the farmers group may not be fully organised per se, but there are clusters, you know. You meet with the north or the east or whatever district, I can't tell him how to do his work, but at the same time, if it's every quarter you meet with one sector, one section of the country to get a lot of feedback, such that because all of this feedback and them will help engineer the process.

And so, for example, when persons tell you who have worked with Minister then, George Brizan, Minister for Agriculture, his constantly monitored and project planning approach with his team and on a constant basis, was able to keep them abreast as to where we are with this, where are we with that, where are we with this.

To me, this is part of the issue that leads to implementation issues. We really should be discussing these things than to say we're short by this, short by that because in a software situation, in real time, we could know by the click of a button how much money was spent already. That's technology; that's what we're living in these days. It will tell you whether or not the project is on stream or a project is lagging behind, and then you have farmers waiting.

I mean, for example, we had a good event a few weeks ago, and the minister said, "I hope you said that because you give us trouble in the Senate". At least he left… He didn't want to hear me. But my good friend… We did something with GIZ, irrigation equipment and so on for farmers, but this is something that was supposed to happen three years ago, two weeks ago, you know.

So you have about 200 farmers to benefit from that. This is good, but the question is, what would have happened to them all that time? You know, so I'm just raising these things because to me, the programmes that are there **(time bell rings)** the activities…

Madam President: I just put my mic on as well.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: Yes. Just… If you let me five minutes, Madam President, please. That's my last point, and then I have some closing remarks I want to make, which are more closing. **(Laughter)** Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Yes, what we were saying is that, although the programme is not bad, farm road, praedial larceny, all those things, but what we want is for it to happen, and if we don't have enough staff, that shouldn't be a problem because it's budgeted for. So, let us put the advertisements. Let us give the young people opportunities to get work. Some of them may be working somewhere else, but they may want to leave and come and walk into the Ministry of Agriculture, particularly, now that you have the pension plan and everything is settled, now their mind is clearer and they know what they are coming into.

I think we need to do that, and I think that to me is fair and just because you have a ministry to run, and if you are running it short, I mean, come on. Would you do that forever? You will just fail. It's like you want to go on a bad road, you don't have a 4x4, but still want to go. You'll never get there, unless somebody comes and pulls you so.

So, Madam President, with that said, I want to use this opportunity, as I close, in my comments to thank the farmers, you know, they'll meet me and say, "Good. Keep going", you know.

One met me the last time he said, "I'm an NNP. I'm an NNP, but I like how you does talk. You straight and you standing up for us. I don't know what you is". You know? **(Laughter)** No. You see… You know. **(Laughter)** I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. **(Laughter)** I don't know. All for takes. I don't know, but the point is that they keep going after me.

I sit here today and one says, "Look, I see they removed the budget for poultry last year, EC$2 million". They are very informed. He said, "I see it gone down to EC$1 million. What's going on? We want to know what's happening with that". This keeps me on my toes, so I can even lie to them. I can't even make up a story, and so I have to read, you see, I have all the papers, because I need to be properly equipped to represent their

interest. So I thank them every day for their support and encouragement. I really thank them.

I thank my staff where I work in GCNA because, you know, for just the support in different ways that they are there and so on. The Board of Directors and the Chair for their support, you know, support is important. They don't even have to say yes, you're doing good or yes, we support you, but just the moral support, you know, that, you know, they are there with you. You know, my friends and everybody, family, you know, that support me through this time inside here, the camaraderie and so on.

We express our use to make things better and with the Almighty God, as my friend would say, we know that prayers and strength will always take us through, but it's all about justice, you know. I would close.

I had a quote, but my computer closed, but it was by Mr. Diouf, who used to be the Chair, former head of the [5]FAO, the Secretary General, basically, he was saying that the whole issue of food security is about justice. And so, I say this to say that the obligation and commitment of the Ministry of Agriculture to feed this nation is about justice; justice to make sure that we get food, justice to make sure that the persons who have to provide the food can get justice to provide the food, because when there is no food and when you cannot eat it is the most scariest moment in a man's life, of course, not when you are intentionally fasting, of course. I thank you. **(Applause)**

Madam President: I thank the Senator representing Fishers and Farmers in the Senate of Grenada for his presentation, which included a number of recommendations, suggestions, and at least one offer of partnership. So I think we are on track for the collective implementation of the Budget, having heard all the speakers today, review and critique, but with willingness.

It's hours late. I must say that Livingston Nelson, I just recognised that's you there, CEO of the Grenada Cultural Foundation. Thank you for joining us, and all those who

[5] Food and Agriculture Organisation

are here today and have now left, thank you for coming.

All Senators, you know who you are, to speak on Thursday. I want to thank the Leader of Government's Business in the Senate for kicking off today, Senator Adrian Thomas, and just to stimulate such a response from the Leader of the Opposition Business in the Senate, Senator Noland Cox, and all others who spoke. As of now, the Senate is adjourned, and we will resume on Thursday. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Yes, supper is provided. That's the big news of the moment. Supper is provided.

Question put and agreed to.

The Sitting of the Senate adjourned on Tuesday, 18th March 2025, at 6:17 p.m.

Resumption
Attendance

The Sitting of the Senate resumed on Thursday, 20th March 2025, at 9:10 a.m.

PRESENT

Madam President
Senator the Honourable Dr. Dessima Williams
in the Chair

Senator the Honourable Adrian Thomas	-	Minister for Tourism, Creative Economy and Culture
Senator the Honourable David Evlyn Andrew	-	Minister for Education
Senator the Honourable Quinc Britton	-	Parliamentary Secretary within the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Economy and Culture with Responsibility for Culture
Senator the Honourable Seville Francis	-	Parliamentary Secretary within the Ministry of Youth and Sports
Senator the Honourable Claudette Joseph	-	Attorney General and Minister for Legal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Affairs
Senator the Honourable Gloria Ann Thomas	-	Minister for Social & Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs (Social Security)
Senator the Honourable Norland Cox	-	Opposition Member of the Senate (Deputy President)
Senator the Honourable Dr. Myanna Charles	-	Opposition Member of the Senate
Senator the Honourable Roderick St. Clair	-	Member of the Senate (Farmers Rep.)

Attendance

ABSENT

Senator the Honourable Salim Rahaman	-	Member of the Senate (Business Rep.)

Prayers
Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Seville Francis

Sergeant-at-Arms: His Honour. Madam President.

(Senate Prayer was said)

Madam President: Honourable Members, please join me in the Lord's Prayer.

(The Lord's Prayer was said)

Madam President: Pray be seated. Pleasant and warm good morning to you all, distinguished Senators, on both sides of the aisle, and to all those in the gallery, thank you for following in first person, the proceedings of this House, and thanks to all those of you online following. The Senate is resumed. Senator Seville Francis has requested the floor. You have the floor, madam, and opening batswoman

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Thank you, Madam President. Allow me to begin by acknowledging everyone present in this Honourable House this morning. Madam President, beginning with you, my colleagues on the "Other Side", my distinguished colleagues who are here to join in the support of this Bill that we are debating this morning.

Madam President, before I lend my full support to the proposed budget, which will continue to transform and advance our beloved nation, allow me to begin on a note of gratitude. First and foremost, Madam President, as we all know, this is my first Budget Debate, and this is only made possible because of the trust and confidence placed in me by a great leader, the Honourable Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell. **(Applause)** Prime Minister, allow me to thank you for allowing me to serve the remarkable youth of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Most importantly, Madam President, with all things, we know, they are impossible without God, and I am eternally grateful, in a more special way more than ever this morning, to the almighty for not just a allowing to be here, but I thank you for calling me

to be a servant with purpose and granting me the opportunity to restore my health to be here today in this Honourable House.

Madam President, life is very uncertain. In honour of International Women's Day, because we are still in the month of March, under the theme, "Accelerating Action", I was on my way to present to a group of young women in St. Andrew about one of the social ills that plaguing our community, our society, Madam President, on Gender Based Violence when I encountered some health complications on my way to St. Andrew. Madam President, I was actually driving, now, we could all been here today singing a different tune reminiscing on my contribution on my time short lived this Honourable House, so today, I stand with a different sense of pride and purpose.

And, Madam President, I also want to publicly commend Doctor Acosta, a young female doctor and her team at the Princess Alice Hospital, who, with professionalism and dedication, attended to me. The service is a testament to the potential within our nation, and I encourage them to continue being the best versions of themselves, particularly because everyone on the team, both males and females, was a young person. **(Applause)** Oftentimes, we hear negative comments about our healthcare practitioners, Madam President, but this morning I want to publicly acknowledge them and thank them for having me here today.

"Towards Vision 75: Grenada—Resilient and Rising", Madam President. As we embark on the journey "Towards Vision 75", we must recognise that our projections and plans for the upcoming fiscal year were not haphazardly assembled; instead, they were carefully crafted to align with our National Sustainable Development Plan for 2035, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and our Government's Mid-term Action Plan.

I must stress this, Madam President. "A hurried bird never built a proper nest". We must build strategically. This 2025 Budget builds upon the successes of 2024, ensuring that all transformational agendas remain steadfast. And, Madam President, I would love to stand here and reminisce on all the achievements that we've had for 2024, but I think the record sets that straight, Madam President. And so I am going to build on what we've achieved and show how, because of those achievements, we're moving steadfastly

ahead in 2025 under this budget presented, Madam President.

Madam President, this morning, with your help and your permission, I would like to request assistance to have something distributed in this Honourable House.

Madam President: What is that something?

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Madam President, it is a key, and it is very significant. I would really love it if you could assist me in allowing this to happen.

Madam President: It relates to your presentation?

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Yes, Madam President.

Madam President: Permitted.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I have a spare key for everyone in this House, Madam President, and I would like for it to be distributed. Madam President, I also have my key. The name of this key is called "Context", Madam President, because context is key.

I have sat in this Honourable house, I have listened to the "Other Place" and, Madam President, one of the things that I found baffling is not the contribution we're lacking context, which is key, particularly, from the "Opposition Side", Madam President, so I decided, you know, in the in the "Other Place" we have a minister who is a plumber, a maintenance man. He has been unclogging pipes, Madam President, but in this House, consider me to be the locksmith of this Upper House, Madam President, because the spare keys I will share today will unlock the doors of finance by this budget as we focus on key priorities.

Madam President, one of the concerns raised by the Opposition is the reduction in the budget allocation for the Ministry of Youth and Sports. This has become the "Other

Side" kumbaya, Madam President. It is their hymn; their go-to song.

Madam President, context is key. Historically, the ministry functions primarily as a program-driven entity, often inflating budget allocations for programs that run on autopilot with little sustainable impact. Madam President, you know, they say when you're married into a family, you get all the baggage that comes with it, and so we have inherited a ministry driven by programmes.

Madam President, we must shift our focus to impact-based budgeting, ensuring that funds are directed where they will create measurable, sustainable development for our youth. **(Applause)** Madam President, the reallocation of resources does not mean that young people have been neglected. There is youth in every sector, Madam President.

Madam President, the Ministry of Youth is not a sector. It is a pillar that fosters the necessary things that our young people need. It is not a sector, but our young people have been made to believe that without the Ministry of Youth, there are opportunities present in this country for them, and that has to be changed, Madam President—whether it is education, social services or agriculture, our young people are engaged across the Government.

Madam President, let me draw your attention. We have our dear Sister Gloria here. Madam President, and under her ministry, for example, the Zero to Sixty – Real Quick Programme was launched in October 2025 to help young people adopt healthier lifestyles and plans, financially, for the later years. Madam President, this is just an example of how strategic reallocation is ensuring a long-term impact. So this is not happening under the Ministry of Youth, but it is catered to the young people of our country.

And I want all young people to understand that the Ministry of Youth is only here to facilitate them and to ensure that the other ministries have policies and programmes in place across the sector to ensure that they benefit the way they need to, Madam President.

Madam President, context is key. The restructuring and redirection of funds are not cuts. I want that to be made abundantly clear. The restructuring and redirection of

funds are not cuts, Madam President. **(Applause)** They are strategic alignments. They are strategic realignments. Let us examine how key programmes continue to align with our national agenda.

Madam President, I will start with the M-Power 4.0 Programme. The key priority of this programme is to focus on boosting youth education and training access. Under the National Sustainable Development Plan, it falls under the strategy for enhancing access to quality education and skills development.

For the Vision 75 policy, Madam President, it seeks to expand access to technical and vocational education and training, higher education and skills-based learning programmes. Under our Midterm Action Plan, it increases scholarship and training programmes for youth. Under the Sustainable Development Goals, it falls under goal number four, quality education, expanding access to education and training, and goal number eight, decent work and equipping youth for employment. Where am I going with this, Madam President? Remember, I said context is key. Now, everything we do must align with what we are walking towards to develop our country holistically.

Madam President, this programme designed… I want to start with the registration aspect of it, and let me tell you why. Now, we are in 4.0 from 1.0 to 3.0; this is how the registration process worked. I want you to follow where I'm going with this.

A list was provided, from the constituency office to the ministry, of persons to be enrolled into the programme. Madam President, we know that under the previous administration, there was no distinction between constituency office and party office, so we weren't sure whether the list came from the party office or the constituency office. Under the 4.0 Programme, Madam President, this is not how it works; an open call system so that every young man in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique can benefit from this programme. That is transformation, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President, I also want us to see the difference between the 4.0, the version. Now, under the previous administration, this stipend was EC$800. At the end of the programme, they would receive EC$1200 as savings, and then the Government would match the EC$1200 with the exact amount, totalling it to EC$2400. Madam

President, under this Administration, the young men have spoken to us, and we have listened, because we listen, and through listening, we have increased their allowance from EC$800 to EC$1,000, Madam President **(applause)**, and top of that, in hand, they are getting EC$900. We hold EC$100 for them, and at the end of the programme, they get EC$1200. Madam President, that EC$1200 is not matched equally. We are now giving them an additional EC$1800 at the end of the programme, which totals their amounts EC$3,000, Madam President. Apart from that, we have a transition period where their hands will be held.

So no longer will resources be wasted, Madam President, so we're not just buying tools, storing them there or giving it to them and in some cases, Madam President, we are not sure it was going to be the right people. So here's what, because we are not here to waste the Government resources.

So, what we have been doing under the M-Power Programme, the staff are well-equipped and trained. They will be holding their hands, walking them through the procurement process, because we believe, Madam President, that while you teach a man to fish, you also have to give him fish to eat. **(Applause)** That is the only way… If he is not well nourished, Madam President, he will not be able to receive the fishing training.

So, they will be assisting them with the procurement process, going with them, showing them how to use the invoices, how to do all of that. So it's not just the case that the programme comes to an end, and we say goodbye to them. There is a monitoring and evaluation process and a follow-up process. We ensure that our young men are particularly empowered in the way they need to be.

And, Madam President, the most important part of this programme for me is the prison version, and I'll tell you why. A report from the Prison's Manager, who, you know, facilitates the M-Power Programme there, indicated to us that the men enrolled in this programme have never become repeat offenders. They have never seen them return to the prison **(applause)**, as opposed to those who did not enrol. Madam President, that is something for us to be proud of.

Furthermore, I would like to highlight that Trinidad has launched their M-Power TT Programme, and the Honourable Shamfa Cudjoe Lewis praised this Administration and praised this programme, this version, the 4.0, indicating her interest in modelling the programme after ours as they seek to improve. Madam President, that is something to be proud of. **(Applause)**

Madam President, I want to use the Osprey Shuttle real quick just to run up to Carriacou because the Honourable Leader of Business on the "Other Side" mentioned, and I listened and I took notes, that there's a cut in the M-Power Programme for Carriacou. Madam President, let me explain.

There is a difficulty in implementing the programme in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and for very good reasons. The programme was designed, Madam President, to upskill and upscale the young men who are not gainfully employed.

Madam President, the young men of Carriacou and Petite Martinique are actively engaged and employee **(applause)** and they have said to us and our YOUth series, particularly, that we don't need the M-Power Programme, what we need is to become professionalised in the skills that we are already have, so how can we become certified, and that is why we have shifted all focus because we cannot have a one size approach across the board, this is not what they need.

I want to, through you, Madam President, ask the Honourable Leader of Business to, of the Opposition, sorry, to give this message to the young men of Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Madam President: Correction for the record, it's…

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Leader of Government's… **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** … Of Opposition Business.

Madam President: We are not changing Governments in the Senate.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Yes, we are not. Thank you. **(Laughter)** Madam President, thank you for the correction, but I still want a message to be conveyed on our behalf. From the Government, I want the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique, we want them to know that we are proud of them, so we say, "Big up to the young men of Carriacou and Petite Martinique". **(Applause)**

Madam President, I move quickly to the Elevate Her Programme because it mirrors the M-Power Programme, obviously, because it is targeting females, and it falls under the pillar that I listed for the M-Power Programme. Now, this programme will address the challenges young women are facing, and that will help to bridge the labour market gap. Training will be provided in literacy and numeracy, life skills and business development. It was designed to equip the young female participants with nationally recognised qualifications to secure job placements within the private sector or provide start-up grants as business support. We already have over 200 young women registered, and we are just waiting to roll out officially and launch the programme.

I want to move now to the National Youth Ambassadors Programme, which, as a key priority, falls under the Youth and Community Engagement. Under the National Sustainable Development Plan, it falls under Increase Civic Engagement and Participation in Governance. Under Vision 75, it promotes youth-led initiatives in civic engagement, voluntarism, and leadership development. It promotes youth leadership and involvement in nation-building.

Madam President, the participants in this programme again answered an open call. We had hundreds of young people applying to this programme. Currently, we have over 80 participants enrolled, and that includes Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and they were selected by an independent selection committee with no bias. Madam President, the professionals on the committee range from different backgrounds and expertise.

Currently, the Youth Ambassadors are undergoing a series of training by our very well-equipped Deputy Consul General at the Consulate General of Grenada. Madam President, no brain drain here. We are utilising our own.

Madam President, furthermore, they will participate in the National Youth Ambassador Symposium on The Role of Youth in CARICOM and UN SDG Ambassador. Additionally, Madam President, the constituency core of the Youth Ambassadors will receive EC$5,000 for grant funding to undertake sustainable projects, and I stress here sustainable projects. **(Applause)** Those projects will be vetted to ensure that they meet the criteria as we follow the procedures and guidelines that we are emulating, which would be the Sustainable Development Goals, et cetera. They will be collaborating and networking to execute the advocacy pillars.

Madam President, the pride of my heart, the programme of the ministry that I admire more than anything else without shame, the National Youth Parliament Programme. Madam President, it falls under the same pillars identified for the Youth Ambassadors Programme. Again, it began with an open call. Madam President, we all know that I am a product of the National Youth Parliament Programme. The only difference is, well, not the only one, because there are many differences.

So it started, and everyone who answered the call had the opportunity to sit on the parish level. We had an independent committee of judges assessing the top three debaters from the parish, who had the opportunity now to become candidates for the National Youth Elections. Madam President, we had 27 candidates from 14 constituencies, and we had over 2,000 young people registering to vote for these candidates. **(Applause)**

Before the representative from Carriacou and Petite Martinique mentions it, I will just say it. No, they are not involved because it was around the same time of Hurricane Beryl's passing, and because of that, we had to ensure that they were given a fair chance. So, Madam President, they are currently preparing Carriacou and Petite Martinique to do their local siting, and from that, their candidate will be selected, and they will get the same process. **(Applause)** They are not totally eliminated from the process.

Madam President, this programme catered for males, females, people of different religions, and political persuasions. It didn't matter. Tout moun bagay. It doesn't matter. The inclusivity was key in this programme, and they will be serving a two-year term. I am

happy to announce that I will also be getting a monthly stipend. Madam President, this is way better than my time when we were lucky to get a snack box. **(Applause)**

Madam President, this programme makes me very nostalgic, you know, for many reasons, because I understand the struggles that those of us who walked and participated in the Youth Parliament Programme, before, went through. Madam President, every time I think of this programme, I get emotional. At one point, three young, brilliant minds, including myself, were expelled from the programme, Madam President, and the reason that happened is because all we asked for was a meeting with the then minister, because we wanted what the programme is now to be then, and we wanted to sit and discuss how that could be possible. Madam President, we were referred to as a "bunch of disgruntled youths".

Madam President, I recall the very first sitting we had in this Honourable House, I was one of the lucky persons, when this building was officially open, to sit here as a National Youth Parliamentarian, and, Madam President, the day before that sitting when the list of participants were provided, and my name emerge as the Prime Minister, I was looked dead in the eye and, Madam President, I make no lies about this, and I was told you are not good enough to be the Prime Minister. Madam President, I was daunted. I was broken, but I believe in proving people wrong.

And so, Madam President, the following day, I came here, I stood in this Honourable House, and I delivered. When I was finished, the same individual approached me and said, "You were remarkable. Can I have a photo to post on Facebook"? **(Laughter)** Madam President, why did I share the story? You see, when you don't have the right youth representative behind you, it is very easy for young people to go astray and to start belittling themselves, not believing in themselves.

Madam President, and I'm asking myself how you can stand in an Honourable House and say that you are for young people. Madam President, you cast us aside. So I want to say to the young people of our dear nation through you, Madam President, that whenever anyone approaches you and tells you that you can't, do not get despondent, do not be dismayed, instead look at them just like I did and say, "Watch me". **(Applause)**

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Madam President, I move now to the Community Grant Fund, because we're focusing on how this budget will help to move our agenda forward. The Community Grant Fund is designed to enhance collaborative advertising and community development of sustainable goals and projects. This fund was derived from research and consultation.

Madam President, I like to call this fund "Passion meets Support". Throughout our YOUth Talk series, one of the common things that we heard was, "We have these ideas, but we do not have the financial backing to support it". So, Madam President, we have listened, and I am happy to announce that a total of EC$225,000 will be disbursed in the following way.

So we're going to have EC$$15,000 per constituency project group, and when I say constituency here, I'm not talking party. EC$5,000 for Youth Parliamentarians. EC$5,000 for Youth Ambassadors. EC$5,000 for youth groups, and we have over 40 youth groups registered. Madam President, those projects, again, for transparency and accountability, and for bias-free selection, we have an external selection committee to ensure that the projects are well implemented. **(Applause)**

Madam President, on top of that, it would not just be a case where projects are being implemented, there will be project management and implementation training, Madam President, because remember I said sustainable projects. So we will have those trainings to ensure that the implementers of these projects are well equipped with the knowledge that they need to ensure these projects are sustainable.

Madam President, I move now to the Youth in Business Programme, which, for the Vision 75 policy, fosters innovation, entrepreneurship and youth-led business ventures. Madam President, oftentimes when programmes are developed, they often cater to those who did not complete education or are looking for second chances, et cetera, but the young people who are steadfast and head on and they're doing great things and need that support have cried, and we have listened. We are here to dry their tears, Madam President, because we now have the Youth in Business Programme. Yes, it was there before; the Yutbiz Programme, and we're all good with that, but, Madam President, as

with everything else, it needs upgrading, and we have assessed and we are moving forward.

And I am happy to announce that we have loans where our partners in this would be GDB and GIDC. So we have loans catering up to 50 people at EC$30,000 max for start-up and established businesses at a 1% interest rate, seven years to pay back on a grace period of six months. We have grants in the amount of EC$3,000 per person, catering for 50 people max. However, you must be registered with the Division of Youth. The pillars that are funded are ICT, education, manufacturing, tourism, healthcare and agriculture.

Madam President, I am also happy to announce that the previous Yutbiz participants or business owners, this Government actively supports them and we utilise them as service providers whenever the Division of Youth have activities, and that must be commended, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President, I move now to the green elephant in the room, and I want to change career for a second because I remember our Prime Minister spoke about there is greatness in every Grenadian, so I feel like I can have multiple careers around here. So I started off this morning as a locksmith and, Madam President, I move now to become an optometrist, and I'll tell you why, because it's either one we have persons in the "Other Place" and probably in here with blurred vision.

So, Madam President, I have walked with different lenses in case anybody needs, including 3D, Madam President, because sometimes the lens needs to be changed in order to see clearly. **(Applause)** Madam President, I want to speak about the New IMANI Programme. I have heard it from almost every contributor in the "Other Place", and I'm sure it is going to be brought up here. So let us address the green elephant in the room.

Madam President, where do I start? Start from the beginning.

Madam President: You start wherever will help you end in the rest of the hour. **(Laughter)**

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Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Madam President, I am very mindful of the time. No worries, and I am very much guided by the Standing Orders too, so I know what it says.

Madam President, I want to begin by replying to the Honourable Member on the "Other Side", and permit me to quote. In their deliberation, at our previous sitting on Tuesday, they said, "The programme gave a false sense of assurance". Saying the programme gave a false sense of assurance is a false statement, and the Honourable Member went further… "There is a $EC14.2 million cut in the budget". Therefore, Madam President, what message are we sending to the young people? The youth have been abandoned with little to no engagement", Madam President. Don't duck; put up your head.

Madam President, through you, I ask, what were the programme objectives? Madam President, how many young people were enrolled? How many transitioned? Madam President, the false hope was first given to the youth by the then administration. **(Applause)** Madam President, the budget was cut for multiple reasons, and that is why I ensured to cut a spare key to remind you that context is key, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President, we had young people joining the programme at the stipulated age and, Madam President, years after they are still in the programme. Madam President, a Bachelor's Degree is just about four years max, and we have people with longer durations than a Bachelor's Degree in the programme. Madam President, we had mothers in the programme, their daughters finishing secondary school and meeting them in the programme.

Madam President, tell me if that is not a false sense of hope for your young people. **(Applause)** Is that the only thing we're telling our young people where they can become gainfully employed? Madam President, I don't want to use the word employed when I am referring to the IMANI Programme. It is a training programme that transitions you into permanent employment, and if that is not happening, it means that you have failed your objective, and the programme is a failure. Madam President, that is the reason why

assessment is key, and with assessment, you either improve or you cut. Madam President, context is key.

Madam President, let me tell you this. EC$700. Imagine a mother in this programme for EC$700. Thank God, this Administration moved the minimum wage; they get something else, Madam President. It moved to EC$1,200 **(applause)**, something that is still not sustainable, but, given that it is a training programme and it is a stipend, we can understand why. Now, if this is a salary, then that is a shame on any administration, Madam President.

Madam President, we had approximately 2,400 persons on the payroll. Note what I said. On the payroll, for this programme, and it is being said that we sent home young people, and we cut the programme. We did no such thing, Madam President. Let me tell you what we did.

We asked the young people in the programme to reapply, re-register, because we needed to manage our data management system. Madam President, after the registration, it went down to just about 1500 participants. Can you guess why? Madam President, up until this month, there have been fewer than 1,500 young people. Want to guess why? Context is key. I am getting there. Madam President, we managed to secure over 343 permanent placements for trainees **(applause)** and over 50 graduates from the scholarship programme portal.

Madam President, let me explain to you. Now, if these young people have transitioned into permanent employment, you see how the stipend payroll goes down, Madam President? So do you see why there is a need for the budget to be cut? Madam President, remember I said context is key. If they are regularised **(applause)** or for other reasons, they are no longer there; there is no point in exploiting the government purse, Madam President. The budget must reflect a decrease. Madam President, do the math, do the deduction, and you will see where the budget cut is. Madam President, that was wastage, not prudent fiscal management. Madam President, this needs to stop.

Madam President, one more thing on the IMANI Programme before I proceed. I looked at the document… multiple documents about this IMANI Programme because I

needed to understand the context, Madam President, and section 3 of the policy document named Policy Plus Procedure said, "The Minister"… Remember who developed this programme, Madam President. Context. Key. "The Minister shall approve a final selection list for youth, and a copy shall be provided to the programme manager and the officers". The Minister decides who the IMANI trainees are, and then that is given to the programme manager, not a bottom-up approach, but a top-down approach.

You could see where I am going with this, Madam President, and if you cannot see, I have lenses. Madam President, this is not a cut. This is a realignment. The programme was restructured to ensure meaningful engagement and a transition into sustainable careers, Madam President. **(Applause)**

I am happy to announce, also, re the IMANI Programme, that we have been in consultation with the private sector, giving them a mandate that these young people have been exploited, and that is my words, not the words of this Government, "exploited" because you have been using them for all these years, which means, the position is vacant and if the position is vacant then you have what I would call a moral obligation to no longer consider them to be trainees. So what has been happening, Madam President?

The private sector has been using these employees, sorry trainees, Madam President, but the Government is paying for that labour. Madam President, I hope you see where I am going with this, and that is the reason why we had to make sure to engage them and give them a time period to get their finances in order to put them on their payroll or else we will do what we have to do, which is take them and get them elsewhere. Madam President, this is an Administration that believes in the young people and giving them what they rightfully deserve, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President, I want to talk about Project FLY because it was mentioned, not because it was an active programme, but I want to bring clarity. It was mentioned in the "Other Place" that when we came in, we cut good programs. Madam President, I am saddened to announce that Project FLY flew away like Super Flying Flint.

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Madam President, when this Administration came in, we had no problems with continuing programmes, but Madam President, we can only continue a programme if we have the data to back it up. So I ask, if you wanted the programme to continue, where is the data? What happened to the files? Answer this question. So when you stand to do the Government Business, tell the truth. We need the data, we don't have no problem continuing a programme, but we cannot continue without comparative data. Madam President, I don't know if it was shredded. I don't know, Madam President, but I am just saying.

Madam President, I move on. Madam President, in the interest of time… I am very much mindful of the time. There are other programmes in different sectors and ministries targeting the youth. We have the Office of Creative Affairs, we have endless scholarships right now, and it is no longer scholarships, where, who I know and the linkology scholarship, Madam President. **(Applause)** It is a scholarship that is open for every young Grenadian to take advantage of, and not just the young ones, but I am representing the youth, so… Madam President, it is there, and I know Honourable David will elaborate on that.

We have the Youth in Agriculture Programme. We have the FAO Programmes with seamoss production and other areas. We have the cybersecurity training. We have the youth and mental health caravan upcoming that will address these gaps by bringing the information to the young people with key stakeholders. Madam President, we have plans for the young people. But I want to tell the young people, do not be despondent by the narrative being pushed out there. The help is there, the opportunities are there. They are not just within the Ministry of Youth, and they are spread across the Central Government.

Madam President, in the interest of time, I want to make mention, and in persons' spare time, they can look at some of the output, the outcomes and achievements that I am super proud of for this ministry. That would be output three, five, 10, 11, 14, and 15. The document is available online, where everyone can see it; outcome number seven and number 10, reasons why I am so proud of this Administration, and I stand proud to

support this budget put forward by our Honourable Minister for Finance. **(Applause)**

Madam President, mental health is near and dear to my heart. For those who know and for those who don't know, I am a mental health advocate. I'm a mental health coach. I work with persons with mental health challenges outside of this realm, Madam President, and so when an entire ministry dedicated to mental health was established, I was ecstatic, Madam President.

This is something that we are to be proud of, Madam President, because we know if the head is affected, nothing else works and in order for us to have a productive sector, we have to ensure that our mental health is intact, Madam President, **(applause)**, and that is what this Ministry is designed to do.

Another area under mental health that I am proud of, the Mental Health Policy. I mean, it is just in a draft stage, but at least we are taking the steps in the right direction. Madam President, statistics have shown that suicide completion usually affects, in the bigger countries, the elderly people the most. Unfortunately, in our little neck of the woods, it is quite the opposite.

And, Madam President, before I go forward, I want to send my condolences to the most recent victim of suicide completion, Madam President, particularly, because it is a young woman. And so I pause just for five seconds to acknowledge the fight and the struggle of this young woman, Madam President, because I think it is important. And this also shows that now more than ever, this Mental Health Ministry is prudent, Madam President.

So you see, under this ministry, the focus would be improving access to comprehensive mental health services, providing continuous training to staff to enhance service delivery, providing and strengthening the legislative and policy framework governing the mental health system, and increasing mental health literacy among the population to combat stigma and misinformation. That is key, because once we have an educated nation on mental health, it will make it so much easier, and our statistics will go down. One suicide completion, Madam President, feels like 100 to us because we are a small nation.

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Madam President, the integration of mental health support into primary health care is important, and that is the focus area because it will decrease the stigma and discrimination of persons, so no longer have you will have to go up to the Mental Health Hospital and somebody seeing you going up there and being labelled and stigmatised as shame but it is accessible at our primary healthcare facilities. That is commendable, Madam President **(applause)**, and that is a focus where this budget will be going.

Madam President, the infrastructural development under mental health, the Mirabeau Rehabilitation Centre, is needed more than ever, Madam President, and we have seen that this has already started and that deserves to be commended. **(Applause)**

Madam President, it would be remiss of me to stand here and not speak about sports, and I am also mindful of my time. No worries. Madam President, I want to move to Sports Development and Infrastructure. You see, we recognise that sports are integral to national transformation, community development and economic growth. The 2025 sports budget is designed to empower communities, develop talent, enhance sports governance and improve infrastructure while aligning with Grenada's Vision 75. This effort will contribute to a healthier, more active, and globally competitive sporting nation, and, Madam President, we know we have talent in Grenada when it comes to sports. That is undoubtedly questioned.

This budget supports parish-level sports development at the grassroots level, upgrading of sporting facilities, lights and Progress Park and La Sagesse Playing Field. Madam President, I also want to go back a little. I heard mention on the "Other Side" in our last sitting on Tuesday about the cricket stadium, and we have a state-of-the-art cricket facility, but we weren't able to secure any cricket games. Madam President, remember I said earlier, when you marry into a family, you inherit everything that comes with it; the good, the bad and the ugly.

Madam President, how were we to secure cricket games with the state of the facility that we met, that is the question. Remember, I say context is key. It is important for us to secure games, yes, but it is also important for us to maintain our high standards and to maintain our good name, Madam President. **(Applause)** Because you cannot

have people coming in to play cricket under these conditions **(applause)** so we preferred to not accept it, cut our losses, refocus and come back, Madam President.

Madam President, Talent Identification and Training. So we're going to have youth sports, festivals, school competition and professional coaching, physical literacy and health-awareness because we need to encourage an active lifestyle through structured programmes, capacity building of coaches and officials, certification and skills development, and as our Prime Minister said, we are investing in the most important capital of our country; the human resources, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Through the National Sports Council, Madam President, the key objectives for 2025 include to reduce physical inactivity by 15%, to increase girl's participation in sports by 35%, to expand community sports programs by 25%, to enhance parish level sports development, to improve sports data gathering and archiving, that's a challenge we have in Grenada, documentation, Madam President. So oftentimes when we are doing research, we always have to, most times, reference other places and other people, but this here will fix this problem.

Upgrades to sports infrastructure, train and develop sports professionals and the key policy reference to achieve this would be our NDC Manifesto, which speaks to the establishment of a National Sports Council, and we have done that, Madam President. **(Applause)** Check.

Under the National Sustainable Development Plan, we have strengthened communities, reduced inequalities and promoted social justice through the National Sports Council. This would be achieved.

Madam President, under the [6]MTAP, to reduce poverty and improve living standards through sports. And under the Sports Council, the National Sports Policy is something that is now in effect, and that is why we were able to see our sports enthusiasts and our sports ambassadors receiving the tangible financial benefits that they deserve.

Madam President, last year in November, Doctor Kirani James received his

[6] Medium-Term Action Plan

payment. Madam President, we had Lindon Victor, we had Anderson Peters, we had the Paralympians being rewarded, and we had the chess players being rewarded. Madam President, and that is because our national sports policy is in full effect. **(Applause)** Madam President, might I add that the promises that were fulfilled in November were promises made to them under the previous administration. Madam President, we keep our promises on "This Side" of the table.

Madam President, we have some programme activities also under the National Sports Council. We have grassroots development, we have the parish councils to lead sports growth through leagues and training and the staging of the 2025 National Holiday Recreation Programme, something that we are all looking forward to. We will also do infrastructural development, which would increase access to safe, gender-equal facilities with lighting, which is important; safe, gender-equal facilities with lighting.

Obviously, we need to build the capacity of our people, especially those in sports, and so there would be training for sports administrators, coaches, referees and medical staff. Madam President, that is so important because at the last Olympics we had our Dr John representing and leading the medical team, and she was highly praised over in Paris for her exemplary work. This is a daughter of our soil, Madam President, and we want to make sure that we have more like her who could be recognised internationally. So we must ensure that these things are in place.

Madam President, we have some special initiatives, like the table tennis development, that is aided by China. We have the youth empowerment and development, where we will be expanding the youth entrepreneurship in ICT, the blue economy and renewable energy.

Sport Inclusion in Education. So we will have closer collaboration with the Ministry of Education to enhance physical education in all schools, and for the budget allocation, it will be divided across five key areas, under the Sports Council, which will be the National Sports Council Administration, the National Sports Council Programmes, the Parish Sports Council and the Parish Sports Council Administration and of course Infrastructure Development. Madam President…

Madam President: Seven minutes more.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Madam President, I don't need seven minutes, but I can take the full seven minutes…

Madam President: Lets…

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: … plus 15 minutes, because I want to get accustomed to the number 15, Madam President. **(Applause) (Inaudible comment by Senators)** Madam President. **(Laughter)** Madam President, I don't know about, to go there to get 15, because lately we're seeing that declining drastically. **(Applause)**

Nevertheless, Madam President, this budget is not just a financial statement. It is a manifesto of transformation. Madam President, it embodies the principles of Vision 75, ensuring that we are not just keeping up but are rising above challenges.

And before I fully conclude, Madam President, it would be very, very remiss of me not to acknowledge the students who are in this Honourable House this morning. **(Applause)** Madam President, I stood here representing their future. I stood… And the teachers, because without the teachers, you know, you guys are very important, we appreciate you guys. **(Applause)** I know you can tell we appreciate you, teachers, because we have done what we said we needed to do. Right?

Madam President, I also want to acknowledge the staff at the Division of Youth and the Division of Sports, Ministry of Youth and Sports, the staff present here, Permanent Secretaries and all other staff of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Madam President, I also take this opportunity to say to the young men and women of my community, Mt. Rich, that when I stand here, I represent you proudly and boldly, and I represent what our future can be. I represent the change that our community so desperately needs and will eventually see.

So, Madam President, I want to remind this Honourable House that this Administration, that this Government led by our youthful Prime Minister, who takes pride

in young people's future, a testament I am to that, Madam President, that we are investing in our youth, we are investing in our communities and our nation's future.

Madam President, this is why I am in full support of the 2025 Estimates and Expenditure Budget. Madam President, to those who claim otherwise, I handed you a spare key because, Madam President, context is always key. Thank you, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President: I thank Senator Seville Francis for her props and, most importantly, for her oral presentation.

Let me just say that I am happy to hear reference to what you think, what you plan and what you anticipate this budget can accomplish in the coming year. Remember, I am presiding. I am not participating, but I make a comment that it would be interesting in the context of your presentation to hear whether or not you or future speakers think that the allocation of EC$44.7 million in the first instance for recurrent expenditure for Youth and another EC$24 million for capital. Whether you think that is adequate, a total of EC$69 million, more or less, is that financing level in keeping with the ambition that you have so eloquently presented? And I ask it not to get into the debate, but to try to allow us to have the data to make judgments and analysis. So it's just a comment on my path.

So I thank you again, and may I warmly welcome the Deputy Speaker of the Grenada House of Representatives, Doctor Clarice Modeste, who has joined the team to which she belongs as they now take the floor. I am not sure which light to recognise because there are two lights on, Senator Cox. I recognise Doctor Myanna Charles, Senator. You have the floor, madam.

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Thank you, Madam President. I rise today not out of ceremony, my dear friends, but out of duty.

- Duty to the healthcare workers who are exhausted and overworked in an underfunded system;

- Duty to the young woman full of potential but lacking opportunities;
- Duty to the families who are struggling to make ends meet due to the rise in cost of living, and with no hope in sight;
- Duty to our fellow brothers and sisters who, after being devastated by Hurricane Beryl, are still under tarpaulins and tents nine months later. **(Applause)**

Madam President, this is the lived realities of our people, well, except for a select few. I rise because this budget must reflect their needs and the needs of every fellow Grenadian who all long for tangible developments, and I hope we can all agree on that. Madam President, before I continue, allow me to extend a warm welcome to the people in the gallery, especially our students, and welcome as well as those tuned in online.

And I will start where the pain is most acute; healthcare. Because when a nation's healthcare system fails, everything else crumbles: the family suffers, the workforce suffers, and productivity suffers. Therefore, it is imperative that health is a priority.

In fact, I must first commend this Administration, and I'd like you to give yourselves a round of applause. **(Applause)** And I know some may wonder why. Well, I must give you credit where it is due. They have truly mastered the art of grand announcements with little to no follow-through. **(Applause)** They have perfected the skill of making mediocrity look like an achievement, and of course, their talent for overspending on travel and entertainment for themselves **(applause)** while underspending in critical areas for the people of this country is nothing short of deception, Madam President. And to go further, Madam President, if those trips brought significant financial benefit to this country, then this would not have been a remark in my contributions here today.

In the 2024 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure under the caption, Strategic Overview, health and wellness was listed as a first strategic priority area for this Administration. Number one, I know my friend said she wants to hear 15, but you were listed as the number one strategic priority area for this Administration, which is health and wellness.

But, Madam President, let's fast forward to the 2025 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, under the same caption, health and wellness has not been demoted to

priority number three that to me is deeply troubling, and this is because in 2024, when health and wellness was listed as a number one priority, we saw nothing happening in the Ministry of Health. Nothing, Madam President, and the evidence is blatant.

So in 2025, when we see health and wellness demoted to number three, this is an indication that we are going from zero to negative, and this is very concerning. So, Madam President, how can this Administration claim to be one that truly cares for its people when, by their own admission, they told the nation that the needle hasn't moved in Healthcare? This sends a chilling message to the nation and blatantly tells us that the numbers on this paper here today mean nothing to this Administration. I am sorry to have to say this, but this is what it shows. Because the very same commitment made in 2024 was just words with no actions to back it up, no follow-through. Nonetheless, I will still delve into the numbers and in my contribution, I will round off the figures.

Madam President, let us talk about the cold, hard facts because the numbers don't lie. In 2024, this Administration approved EC$122 million for Health, and yet EC$24 million was left unspent. The year before that EC$27 million was left unspent. So there is no excuse for not having made progress over the last two years. They had the money. It was approved in the budget, and yet not spent on critically needed services. That is EC$51 million total over two years, and I see all of them have their heads down, so I ask this Administration, where is that money and why wasn't it spent?

EC$51 million that could have been used to buy essential medication. EC$51 million that could have been used to repair or upgrade our health facilities. EC$51 million that could have been used to hire doctors and nurses so that our people don't have to wait hours in the emergency room or months for a surgery. Madam President, this EC$51 million is not just a number; it is a lost opportunity for our people. **(Applause)**

It pains me to say this now, and this makes me very emotional, but I wouldn't be surprised, Madam President, if some have lost their lives due to that. And now, we have yet another proposed budget for healthcare, and I cannot help but wonder what will be done differently this third time around? And it seems that this Administration has a pattern. One that places optics over outcomes. **(Applause)** One that underspends in

critical areas and overspends on travel, with nothing substantial to show for these trips.

Madam President, let's take a closer look at the 2025 Budget allocations for Health under Vote 50. This year, the total allocation for the health sector stands at EC$159 million, with EC$94 million allocated to recurrent expenditure and EC$64 million to capital expenditure.

At first glance, one might say, "Well, yes, the Budget has increased", but let's break it down because the picture is not as pretty as they want us to believe. In 2024, they approved the recurrent expenditure for Health was EC$100 million, but only EC$88 million was spent despite the glaring and urgent need for better healthcare services. The EC$12 million that was left sitting there was not enough in the first place to resolve the severe shortages in medical resources and staffing. And now they come in 2025 and decrease the allocation for recurrent expenditure by EC$6.2 million. When compared to what was approved in 2024, Madam President, this does not even cover the shortfall of the previous two years, so how is that an improvement?

Madam President, and for the benefit of the youths and everyone in the gallery, permit me to explain what recurrent expenditure is. Recurrent expenditure covers critical, non-negotiables, day-to-day expenses that keep our healthcare system running. It includes social benefits to those in need, salaries for doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, employee allowance, training and continuous education to improve healthcare delivery, maintenance of our hospitals, medical stations and health centres, provision of essential medical supplies.

Madam President, as I said earlier, the numbers don't lie. The budget tells us yet again that healthcare is not a priority for this Administration, as evidenced by cutting the very budget that ensures our hospitals are staffed, our health centres have resources, and our people have access to the care they need. Tell us, who does this help? It is that this Administration no longer intend to provide medication for the poor? Is it that they no longer intend to make healthcare accessible to the most vulnerable? Is it that they no longer intend to correct their staff shortages?

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Myanna Charles

Madam President, I stand here right now, and I will lay some additional facts, and I invite my colleagues on the "Other Side" to clarify or even verify some of them if they so desire. If someone comes in with a life-threatening condition like a heart attack, for example, the hospital cannot confirm the diagnosis because a basic blood test, which is essential for confirmation, is simply not available. Let that sink in.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I got a call from a friend, Madam President. She was frantic, she was desperate because her loved one was in that exact situation, and do you know what broke my heart? Not just the fear in her heart, Madam President, but the cruel reality that in 2025, with an administration that claims to prioritise healthcare, we are still gambling with people's lives over something as basic as a blood test.

Any given day, the lab is functioning at reduced capacity due to not having the test or reagents or due to a broken machine, basic testers not available, patients are forced, Madam President, to borrow money to pay for private labs out of pocket and after all that they must still pray that they have enough money left to buy medication they need because the hospital has run out.

Two out of the five dialysis chairs offering life-saving treatment to our citizens battling kidney disease are not functional and have been down for months. There are medical stations that are opened once per month because of staff shortages. A number of community health centres or facilities, I should say, because it includes medical stations as well, cannot be reached because the landlines don't work, let that sink in. Imagine you cannot reach your medical facility because the landline not working, how can we call this a functioning healthcare system?

Nurses who want to advance their training are left without opportunities, yet this Government in the "Other Place" boast about training a handful of staff. Yes, it is better than nothing, but let us be real, it is grossly inadequate.

And let me remind this Chamber, some of the achievements listed in the "Other Place" began under the previous administration, the New National Party. **(Applause)** So I ask, what has this administration done for healthcare?

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Myanna Charles

Madam President, our doctors are being held hostage by bureaucracy and intimidation, their morale is at an all-time low. I will echo a short sentiment of many healthcare providers. They say to me, "It feels like if the Ministry of Health is in war with us". The ministry employees are saying that the ministry is at war with them. How do you expect them to work without tools and supplies? They are not magicians. They are one of our most valued resources.

Madam President, it is very painful to speak about what people experience at healthcare services. Let me give you the most recent example. As recently as a few hours ago, there was an emergency transfer last night from Princess Royal Hospital with a patient. The General Hospital was informed of the transfer. Madam President, the boat took an hour and 45 minutes to get down to St. George's. On arrival at around 12:20 a.m. this morning, there was no ambulance waiting to receive the patient; mind you, this was an emergency transfer.

Madam President, after several calls by the nurse who accompanied the patient, still no ambulance. Members of the Royal Grenada Police Force at the Central Police Station, after recognising that some time had passed and no ambulance, they came and inquired and also placed calls to the hospital to follow up on the patient transfer. Madam President, when water more than flour, together with the police and the nurse, suggested using a private vehicle to transfer the patient. As they were about to do so the ambulance was seen coming, arriving there at 1:10 a.m. Madam President, from 12:20 a.m. to 1:10 a.m., almost an hour, waiting. And what was even worse, the ambulance came with the driver alone. No nurse to receive the patient. The nurse from Carriacou has to now get into the ambulance and go to the hospital, which will further delay the departure of the chartered boat back to Carriacou. Madam President, these are the experiences of the people of Carriacou.

It could have been any one of us on that boat, which is why the issues confronting this healthcare system are so scary. Madam President, this is the sad reality. This is what we call a functioning healthcare system? Is this the transformation agenda? It has been three years with nothing to show for it, and while our hospital run out of medicine,

when our lab shelves have no reagents to run vital tests, while equipment is down for prolonged periods, while our patients wait months for surgery because there is one anaesthesiologist, while our healthcare workers cry out for help, this Administration had EC$51 million at their disposal over the last two years and did absolutely nothing.

Madam President, this Administration is talking about a new hospital. Let me be clear, a new hospital is an asset for any country. It is a great strategy to have for the long term, but what about the short term? Tell me.

Let me also be clear when is say that a hospital is not just a building, if we are only thinking about the hospital as a building and not the healthcare system as a whole, then we are going nowhere. **(Applause)** This trend of missing the now and thinking in a unidirectional manner when patients are literally suffering before our eyes today is a lack of planning and foresight that we see time and time again from this Administration.

If you do not ensure that we have specialists to treat our people, medication to heal them, diagnostic tests to detect diseases early and adequate insurance ensuring access for all, then all we are doing is building a monument. Our people do not need a monument; they need a functioning healthcare system, they need their lives to be saved.

For this project to come into fruition, I ask my colleagues on the "Other Side" of this Chamber to kindly indicate the source of funding for the completion of this new hospital, not for phase one, but for the completion of this new hospital, since we are talking of hundreds of millions.

My colleague on the "Other Side," the mover of the Motion, said in his contribution that they are thinking about it to the end. So, clarify for me where the funds are coming from for the completion of this project. Not for phase one. Do you intend to take more loans and plunge this country into further debt? Tell me. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** That's the only time I heard a comment from my colleague on the "Other Side". When I was addressing all the deficiencies, you know… So he agrees to borrow more money and **(applause)**, plunge the country into further debt.

Madam President, I want to put on record in this Honourable House that I see no problem with backing down for the concept of a new hospital at this time and

strengthening what we already have at a fraction of that cost and with instant benefit for our people.

Madam President, I want to draw your attention to some disturbing numbers as it relates to our healthcare facilities. Line item: Upgrade of Health Facilities. EC$1 million budgeted for health facility upgrade in 2025. We must not forget that in 2024, EC$1 million was approved for a health facility upgrade, but only EC$175,000 was spent. Is the million for all the health facilities, or is it for a specific facility? Is this Administration aware that we have 30 medical stations, six health centres, the General Hospital, Princess Alice Hospital, Princess Royal Hospital, because if it is for all of the facilities, then it is clearly not enough, and yet we are still not spending it?

Line item: Refurbishment of Buildings, EC$300,000 is budgeted for the refurbishment of buildings. In 2024, EC$700,000 was approved, and only EC$478,000 spent. On which buildings? Can this Administration give this Honourable House a breakdown of the buildings that were refurbished in 2024?

Line item: Repair to Carlton House. In 2024, EC$500,000 was approved to re-establish Carlton House, a facility for persons suffering with substance abuse, zero dollar spent. Are you abandoning Carlton House and the right against substance abuse, or is the EC$1 million budgeted in 2025 for the Mirabeau Rehabilitation Centre intended to replace Carlton House? Please provide some clarity regarding this and give some details on the services that will be provided by the Mirabeau Rehabilitation Centre, and a timeline for completing this project.

Line item: Smart Upgrade to Hospital Infrastructure. In 2025,j EC$100,000 is budgeted for smart upgrade. Let's not forget that in 2024, EC$400,000 was approved, but zero dollars were spent. What happened there? Where has this money gone? Was it reallocated?

Line item: Reconstruction of Gouyave Health Centre, in 2025, EC$700,000 is budgeted for the reconstruction of Gouyave Health Centre and to restore the former building that was temporarily used during the Health Centre construction. Last year, EC$700,000 was approved for this, Madam President, zero dollars spent.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Myanna Charles

Madam President, I must raise a serious concern about the EC$700,000 allocated for the reconstruction of the Gouyave Health Centre. This is a new building. It is not an old, crumbling structure needing reconstruction. In fact, it was built less than five years ago, so if you intend to restore the effects, then say so. Why name that line item reconstruction? Be transparent. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Madam President, we need transparency. This Government must explain how they are spending the people's money. Also, why is the Gouyave Health Centre not operating in its full capacity? It is my understanding that equipment that has been donated has gone missing. Where is the missing equipment?

Line item: Health Centre and Medical Stations Maintenance Project. Madam President, while our health centres crumble, this Government allocated a mere EC$150,000 in 2024 for Health Centre and Medical Station Maintenance. Out of that, only EC$48,000 was spent. Now, in 2025, the same EC$150,000 is budgeted for maintenance.

Let's break this down. As I mentioned before, we have 30 medical stations and six health centres. This means EC$150,000 divided by 36 facilities, which equates to EC$300 per month, per facility. Madam President, EC$300 per month is supposed to maintain an entire health facility? What can EC$300 per month do in today's economy? Probably buy a can of paint. I don't know, because I know painting is a thing for some.

Now, this has to be a miscalculation, but let's entertain another possibility. Maybe. Just maybe, there is another allocation hidden somewhere else in this budget for the exact same thing, and if that's the case, then why is this Administration double-dipping? Madam President, this is not a serious investment in health care infrastructure, and this 2025 allocation clearly shows us that.

I am now going to move to chronic diseases. Madam President, let us talk about chronic diseases. Line item: National Non-communicable Disease Control Programme, which is supposed to tackle the main cause of death and disability in this country. The 2025 budget allocated a mere EC$125,000 for this. To put this into perspective for everybody here today, or as my good friend "Other Side" would say, "Context". **(Inaudible**

comment by a Senator)

Non-communicable diseases are chronic diseases and include conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, cancer, asthma and the list goes on and on. According to data from the World Diabetes Federation in 2021, one in seven adults, that is 10,000 adults in Grenada, has diabetes, and these numbers have since increased. Based on that data for diabetes alone, mind you, I listed a few chronic diseases, not all. If we estimate that at least 60,000 people at some point in the year need chronic disease management, this allocation translates to a simple EC$2 per person for the year. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** EC$2 per citizen for the year. Can you think of anything that costs EC$2 a year? A year. And while this Administration offers EC$2 per citizen per year, they have somehow found over EC$18 million for the so-called Beautification and Transformation Programme, overspending by EC$6 million. I will leave that for you to ponder on.

So let me ask, am I missing something? Is there another allocation tucked away in this budget specifically for chronic disease management? If so, I stand corrected, and I invite this Administration to point me to that line item because I would love some clarity, and if not, then let's call this what it is, misplaced priorities, lack of vision, or I wonder if this transformation is all about.

Madam President, if this Administration is even remotely serious about health and wellness, they must increase this allocation because chronic diseases are not just numbers on a page. They are the reasons why people are in our hospitals, in our clinics and struggling to survive every day. And if this Administration does not see this as a priority, then perhaps my friends on the "Other Side" can explain how this budget treats health care as a whole as a priority.

Medication. Madam President, not sure if you're aware of the OECS Pool Procurement Services, but I think it's my duty to explain to everyone. This is an arrangement where OECS countries collectively purchase medication and medical supplies in bulk to secure lower prices and ensure adequate distribution across member states. It is intended to be a cost-effective way to keep essential medication available to

all. I think that it is necessary to explain this so you can understand, according to my friend, the context in which I am addressing this line item.

I would like to draw your attention to page 851 for this line item. In 2024, this Administration approved a mere EC$12,500 for this programme, and not a single dollar was spent according to the budget. These are the figures presented to us; unless this budget has numerous errors. I don't know. Now, in 2025, the budget has an allocation of EC$112,500. Let's put that into perspective, or as my friend will say, context is key, so let me give you some context.

In 2024, this Administration allocated the equivalent of one cent per Grenadian for essential medication and supplies. Now, in 2025, they have increased this to just EC$1 per Grenadian. Context is key, so here is the context. Madam President, this is not only an insult, but I do believe that you all will agree that this is far from addressing the pertinent problems in health care. How does this Government expect to adequately stock our hospitals, health centres and pharmacies with life-saving medication, which costs EC$1 per citizen? Really?

This underfunding explains the empty medicine shelves in our hospitals and dispensaries, the increased burden on the health care system as untreated conditions escalate into emergencies, and the overcrowding in casualty wards as preventable diseases go unmanaged due to medication shortages. If this Administration had properly allocated funds and utilised the OECS PPS Programme, our hospitals would not be facing medication and medical supply shortages to the degree and length at which they exist today, and that is a fact. **(Applause)** And this is an obvious failure, Madam President, of identifying what the priorities are in healthcare. They cannot even identify it, so how can you remedy it?

Madam President, let us now turn to the handling of grants. Grants are not loans. Am I correct? **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Are they loans? They are given to governments to support critical programmes that directly impact the people, and they do not have to be repaid. Am I correct? **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** All right. I draw your attention to page 850, Capital Expenditure by Source of Fund.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Myanna Charles

In 2024, this Administration approved EC$2.1 million in grants, but only EC$500,000 was spent. This raises critical questions: Did this Administration send back the EC$1.5 million to the grantor because they failed to spend it on a critical healthcare initiative, or is it that they failed to secure the said grants they budgeted for? I would like to have some clarity in this regard. Madam President, this is unacceptable and indefensible.

While our hospitals run out of essential supplies, this Administration failed to use EC$1.5 million in grant funding. While patients are being turned away because of a lack of mattresses on beds in some of our wards, EC$1.5 million was left unspent in grant funding. How hard is it to use money that you don't have to pay back in areas where it is needed? Madam President, I would like to hear from this Administration the steps that would be taken to prevent this from happening again in 2025.

In democratic countries, governments are held accountable, no? Last time I checked, we are a democracy, but sadly, the lack of accountability will continue to lead us further south. Madam President, while essential areas of healthcare continue to suffer, this budget includes vague and questionable allocations that raise serious concerns about transparency and accountability. **(Applause)**

We see EC$1.5 million allocated for Focus Succession Planning, yet there is no clear explanation of what this entails. Similarly, EC$300,000 has been earmarked for a Capacity-Building Campaign, but has this money been spent on actual workforce development? Madam President, we need mattresses in hospitals. We need to reagents in the labs. We need medication on our shelves. **(Applause)** We need landlines to be working. We need doctors and nurses to be taken care of. We need staff shortages to be bridged. We need the backlog of surgeries to be taken care of. We need those things today. In fact, we needed it yesterday. **(Applause)**

Speaking as a Medical Doctor and Public Health Specialist, this healthcare budget needs to be revisited and restructured in view of all the things mentioned earlier, so that it can be impactful on the ground, failing which we will be sitting here in this very Chamber, hopefully in seven to eight months from today, repeating the same outcry. Mark my

words.

Madam President, this is not an exhaustive list I have mentioned. There are many more issues that need addressing, but in the interest of the time allocated for my contribution, I am compelled to move on to the next topic.

Youth and Sports, Vote 19. Madam President, you know what resonates at this time in Grenada? It is a reality that talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not; that is what resonates. Not context is key. Across our tri-island state, young people brim with potential in the classrooms, on the fields, in the workplaces, in this very House, look at all the students we have here today, in their communities, yet this budget does not meet them with the opportunities that they deserve. In fact, I see a harsh blow being served.

Before I go any further, I would like to address my fellow young woman on the "Other Side" side of the aisle. My colleague on the "Other Side" said, in a lot of words, that youth is an area that is over-budgeted, her words, not mine, over-budgeted, to make an excuse for the harsh blow we see in the 2025 Budget.

But, Madam President, we on "This Side" deal with numbers, and in the 2025 Budget, under Vote 40, we saw over EC$12 million in overspending in the Division of Youth. So, if, according to my friend on the "Other Side", this is an area that is over budgeted, how do you explain the overspending? Tell me. I really want to know. You know what this key she distributed is for? It is to lock the door on the facts. **(Applause)** So, Madam President, permit me, through you, to return this key, where is it, on the "Other Side" because we here will not hide the facts. So permit me to return it, please.

Which is that, we see a 40% cut in the Division of Youth, from what was spent in 2024, and we see a 30% slash in the Division of Sports. Madam President, what message does it send to young people of this nation? To the students in the gallery here today, where is the government's commitment to youth empowerment, skill training and job creation? Job creation. How does this Administration stand there and try to justify gutting the very programmes, like the IMANI, and my friend had a monologue on it, and others that serve as stepping stones for our youth, to build a future? Please do show this Honourable House how that is contributing to the long-promised transformation beyond

lip service **(inaudible comment by a Senator)**, and I understand they no longer talk about the transformation.

Madam President, my colleagues on the "Other Side" seem to be assessing and reading what the previous administration has done for the last three years rather than acting. I am sure she may need the lenses soon that she walked in here with today. Let me say this, and I will quote from the Member on the "Other Side" because what she's reporting is not new. Context is key. If you haven't taken any new applicants into the program, how would you see an increase in the numbers? Tell me.

Madam President: Senator Charles, I believe, please pause. Senator Seville has requested the floor. What is it, madam? Point of Order?

(Inaudible comment by a Senator)

Madam President: Microphone, please.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Madam President, I stand on a Point of Clarity.

Madam President: Proceed.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Though you, Madam President, I would like the Honourable Member, Doctor Senator Charles to please provide proof to this Honourable House at which point during my speech, I mentioned, and she said, "The Honourable Member said, and I quote, 'That the budget for the Ministry of Youth or for the youth of Grenada is over budgeted'". If that can't be provided, Madam President, I would like for the Honourable Member to please retract the statement and stop misleading this Honourable House. **(Applause)**

Madam President: Thank you, Senator.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Myanna Charles

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Madam President, this is not a Point of Clarification, and I will not yield. I will continue with my debate if you so permit me.

Madam President: What did you say about the Point of Clarification requested?

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: I said, this is not a Point of Clarification, and if you would permit me, I will not yield, I will continue with my contribution. In the interest of time, I have 20 minutes left, and I still have a lot more to say.

Madam President: It's a point of information. Are you saying you stand by your statement?

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Yes, Madam President.

Madam President: Proceed.

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Thank you. And let us be clear, when it comes to sports, it is not just mere games, sport is an ethic, sport is a culture. It is a catalyst for change, a force for national pride and a vehicle for economic mobility.

When we cut sports funding, we don't just take away a ball or a field, we take away scholarships, international exposure and professional coaching. Access to sports is not limited to youths, Madam President. It is for everyone in different age groups. It positively impacts our health, so when we cut budgets in those areas, we are directly impacting health. Does this Government not realise that sport is also a powerful tool in crime prevention, community engagement and national development? Does it not recognise that every dollar invested in sports is a dollar invested in keeping young men and women healthy and away from the dangers of crime, drugs and violence? Madam President, allow me to be frank. This is a policy failure **(applause)**, another missed opportunity, and a betrayal of our young people's future.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Myanna Charles

This Administration is one of rebranding, not innovation. If this Administration were serious about youth development, it would invest, not divest, in their future. **(Applause)** But instead of innovation, all we see in this budget is the rebranding of old programmes, repackaging with new names, but with the same NNP foundation. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator) (Applause)**

Let's talk specifics. The M-Power Programme started by the New National Party, designed to provide young men ages 18 to 35 with self-empowerment, holistic development, skills certification and employment opportunities. In 2025, EC$3.5 million has been allocated, but in 2024, the approved allocation was EC$2.5 million, and only EC$1.1 million was spent; only EC$1.1 million was spent. You can look at them or should I repeat these numbers?

Madam President, where is the accountability to our youth? I challenge this Government to provide answers. How many participants enrolled in the M-Power Programme in 2024? How many completed the programme? How many secured employment and started businesses after completing their said programme?

You cannot claim to champion youth by underspending on youth programmes and then turning around and cutting funding. Let us not forget, this is a nation where youth unemployment remains high, the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework Report exposes this truth, and it goes further to tell us that our young women face a higher unemployment rate—15.8 % compared to 7.2 % for men. The highest levels of unemployment existed among those up to age 24.

Yet, where in this budget is the bold, decisive action to address this? Where is the structured investment in skills training and innovation to equip young people for today's economy? Madam President, our young people do not want handouts; they want opportunities, and they need to be truly empowered. They want to work, they want to build, they want to contribute, but what they have been given instead is a budget that shrinks their prospects, slashes their opportunities and stifles their future. The youth of this nation are watching. Madam President, I wonder how they would respond right here

in this discussion. They will remind us very soon of this very discussion, yes, they will remind us very soon. I urge this Administration to reconsider.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Charles. Senator Seville, you've requested the floor.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Thank you. Madam President. Yes, I have requested the floor because, Madam President… Sorry. I am standing on a Point of Order, and the rules of the House indicate clearly that we are not to mislead the Members in this Honourable House. And, Madam President, as requested in my first rising, I asked that the statement be retracted because such a statement was never uttered during my presentation. Therefore, I would like us to review the Hansard so that this can be clarified, because I do not wish for the young people of this nation to have the misrepresentation and the misconception that their representative is saying that the reduction in the budget is, in fact, a good thing. **(Applause)**

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Seville. The request for the Hansard reporters to take note, and, of course, you can exercise your right to reply later on, following the presentation of Senator Charles. I'm not sure, actually, about that because you can only speak once in the Budget Presentation. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** So, at the time of the Adjournment, you can come back to it. But I hear your request, and it will be so reflected in the Hansard Report that you did not say what you said, what is said you said. Is that it… What you're saying? One second, everyone.

(Madam President converses privately with the Clerk)

(Inaudible comment by Senators)

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Myanna Charles

Madam President: Let me take some information from the Deputy President of the Senate. Go ahead, sir.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, it's within the right of any Member to request a copy of the Hansard for clarity on any utterances in the House. And so, whenever that particular statement or comment can be verified… Because I believe both Members are feeling correct in their responses and their position as search, Madam President, so when you have that Hansard, you will give a determination as to what was said or what was not said and whether or not a comment could be struck off or maintained as it is. That's basically it. It just… The only issue, Madam President, I don't know if the copy will be available at the time of closing, but you can always deal with it at a later date… So, thank you.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Cox. Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I believe that each one of us here has been listening to both Senators in regards to what was uttered, and I think it's up to you, Madam President, to rule on the matter at this point in time and as to when that will be determined. If it can be determined now before the Senator proceeds, I think it will be in the best interest of this House and the general public. So I leave it up to you, Madam President.

Madam President: Thank you. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** For some guidance, here we are speaking on Article 35 of the Standing Order, Article 35, interruptions and a Point of Order. Now, if Senator Francis is refuting a statement that she's alleged to have made, she's refuting that claim by Senator Charles, we have to… At least, I have to be sure that you did not say that to be able to instruct Senator Charles to remove it from her statement because you did not make it.

I haven't seen the… I don't recall your exact words. I have not seen the Hansard, so if you are confident, if you are repeating that you did not make such a statement, then I think it is incumbent on Senator Charles to say she withdraws reference to that statement if you are sure and we are sure that that statement was not made by you. Senator Charles.

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Madam President, I think you know, we can wait for the Hansard, and when I do see that, or when you do review that, then we can make a decision at that time.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I want to suggest that maybe we take a five-minute recess break, then we could verify the matter, clarify it now, and then proceed this afternoon. **(Applause)**

Madam President: Thank you, Senator. That was my thought. We need the Hansard now. Adjourned. Senator Francis, Senator Charles and Senator Adrian Thomas, I see you right now in my office. Clerk, send in the Hansard Report.

Senate adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Senate resumed at 11:40 a.m.

Madam President: The Senate is resumed. I thank all the distinguished Members of the Senate, members of the public, and school children. Thank you very much for your patience with us, and I particularly would like to thank the Hansard team for so swiftly producing the written record. Thank you all.

I also omitted earlier on to welcome the school children to our debate on the Estimates, you're very welcome. And I also want to welcome the Leader of the

Opposition in the House, Emmalin Pierre, MP, who is also with us. Thank you very much. Senator Charles, you have to floor, madam.

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Thank you, Madam President. And thank you for your consultation. I would like to state that it is my interpretation that my colleague on the "Other Side" said in a lot of words that youth is an area that is over budgeted. Over budgeted to make an excuse for the hash blow we see in the 2025 Budget. **(Applause)** Madam President, the facts are there. We saw a 40% cut in the Division of Youth. A 30% slash to the Division of Sports. The youth of this nation are watching, Madam President. I wonder how they would respond right here in this discussion. They will remind us very soon of this discussion, and I urge this Administration to reconsider, to reallocate and to reprioritise, because when you cut youth funding, you do not just cut programmes, you cut futures, you cut dreams, and you cut the very foundation of this country's tomorrow. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Madam President…

Madam President: Thank you for pausing, Senator Charles. Senator Francis, you have the floor.

Sen. the Hon Seville Francis: Thank you, Madam President. I am not standing to disrupt the Honourable Member for disruption's sake. But, Madam President, on a Point of Order. We just had a consultation where the agreement was for the statement to be retracted before proceeding. The statement… A new statement was made, but no retraction of the old statement.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Francis.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: Senator Charles, I think this is what we agreed to.

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Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Thank you, Madam President. It was my understanding that we agreed to clarify the statement and to state my interpretation of the statement. That was… That was my understanding, and this is what we agreed on.

Madam President: Based on the retracement. **(Sound of gavel)**

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Madam President, it is my understanding that we agreed to reformulate, not retract. This is what was discussed… That we agreed to reformulate. In fact, the "Other Side" of the House heard the reformulation before I came back in here, and they agreed. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** But we agreed to reformulate. **(Inaudible comment by Senators) (Sound of gavel)** This is what we agreed to do—reformulate. **(Inaudible comment by Senators) (Sound of gavel)**

Madam President: Senator Francis.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Yes, Madam President.

Madam President: You were speaking. I want to hear your response to the manner in which Senator Charles has…

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Madam President, from the very first time I stood, I asked that the statement be retracted. The fact that we went into a private session to discuss and to consult, I would not agree to anything less. Therefore, Madam President, in the midst of the other persons who were in the consultation, the agreement was, yes, the statement was reformulated to reflect her interpretation, which is fine. However, the statement previously made, which is being reformulated, must be retracted in order for a new statement to take precedence **(applause)** and to have the meaning that it so desires. **(Applause)** And that is only fair, Madam President. Because then we have two statements on the floor, and the statement before once is not retracted, reflecting that

Senator Seville Francis said that the Ministry of Youth budget is over budgeted for young people. And I do not wish for the sentiments to be in the ears or recorded for young people to think **(applause)** that this Administration don't care about them.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Francis. Senator Charles, before you speak, please approach the Chair, the Presidency.

(Senator the Honourable Myanna Charles approached the Madam President's Table)

Madam President: Senator Charles.

Sen. the Hon. Myanna Charles: Madam President, thank you for your guidance on this matter. This reformulation, I am going to state, retracts what was said earlier, and this reformulation reads, I would like to clarify that it is my interpretation that my colleague on the "Other Side" said in a lot of words that youth is an area that is over budget, over budgeted, to make an excuse for the hash blow we see in the 2025 Budget. Madam President, the facts are there, we saw a 40% cut in the Division of Youth, a 30% slash to the Division of Sports, so this is the third time I'm facing the reality—the cuts we saw in the Division of Youth and Sports.

The youth of this nation, I will say it again, Madam President, are watching. They are watching, and they will remind us very soon of this very discussion. And again, I would like to encourage this Administration, or rather urge it to reconsider, reallocate and reprioritise. Because when you cut youth funding, you do not just cut programmes, you cut futures, you cut dreams, and you cut the very foundation of our country's tomorrow.

Madam President, if you allow me, I will proceed, and I do hope I get back the time to housing. Madam President, every ministry, every department, should be looked into deeply. The problem should be extracted, and the solution should combine genuine consultations on the ground in order to yield the best outcome for our beloved country.

So, as it relates to Housing, when I first heard this Administration talking about tackling the housing deficit, I applauded the principle. After all, every Grenadian deserves a safe, affordable place to call home. But principle without performance is what? It's just propaganda. Initially, it was 500 homes per parish. Then the target was 500 Grenadian-style homes per year, which means by now we should we should have more than 1000 by now. But, Madam President, let us cut through the rhetoric and look at the reality.

Millions were allocated, plans were laid… How many happy homeowners did we get from this programme today? Please advise us, and now, three years later, the vision has shrunk, but what do we have to show for it?

Madam President, under Vote 33 in 2024, EC$9 million was approved, and EC$9 million was claimed to be spent. This year, another EC$10 million is allocated, and how many happy homeowners do we have to show for it? How many?

This Government speaks of the Emergency Housing Recovery Plan under the Build Back Better Project. But let me ask, Madam President, how would you could we define an emergency? What is an emergency? Is it a story I told earlier about a patient who was transferred from Carriacou? Because nine months after Hurricane Beryl struck, farmers in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, where 98**%** of the houses were destroyed, are still sleeping in tents, still covering their roofs with tarpaulins, still waiting for relief that was promised months ago. And while we sit in this Chamber and debate, while people are suffering, my colleague Senator Cox told us in this Honourable Chamber on Tuesday, about the reality in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and I was very saddened by it. Just last week, visitors to Carriacou left with their hearts shrinking and sinking because the gap between the Government promises and the reality is horrific. It is wide. **(Applause)**

Madam President, 147 houses at various stages, what does that even mean? We heard that in the "Other Place", 147 houses at various stages of construction. Madam President, what does that mean? We want to know how many have been completed. How many have been handed over, and when will the next 100-plus be handed over? That is what the people want to know. Madam President, this is what you call broken promises.

And then, Madam President, we heard about, you know, they're going to address the housing shortage, and they don't make idle promises. Well, what do you call this? We understand that there are challenges, and one of the challenges we heard in this House was a shortage of skilled workers. So let me ask, how did you not anticipate this? What is your plan to remedy it? How does a government commit to building all these homes in the first instance without ensuring the workforce to build them? Where are the people to build them? Wasn't that something that needed to be addressed before making such a promise?

And, Madam President, you know, this morning I promised myself I wasn't going to go there. But let us talk about the Chinese-built apartments donated by the Government and the People of China for low-income families. What happened with that what happened? What happened? Instead of ensuring that low-income Grenadians got these homes, it is my understanding that the majority of units were sold, yet they remain unoccupied. Can you imagine that people are buying houses, and they're not even staying in them? So I ask, who were they sold to? Were they sold to Grenadians, and if not, why not?

Madam President, the people of this country deserve reliable answers through this budget. I will repeat. They need answers through the budget. This Administration must make deliverable promises. Grenadians are tired of beautiful words; they are losing hope, Madam President, they are losing faith that daily. We don't need fancy press releases and lofty speeches. We need houses for our people most affected by Hurricane Beryl.

I call on this Administration to move on and to move from excuses to execution. Please. **(Applause)** I beg. Move from excuses to executions, move from broken promises to proper planning. Madam President, the people are watching, and they will not forget this.

And, you know, just to go back, with the houses, I know my friend said, "Yes, they were sold to Grenadians". Were they sold to Grenadians living here? I would like to know if you have a breakdown… Local? **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Were they sold to Grenadians living here? I would like to just know that.

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Madam President, we see an increase in the budgetary allowance here, in terms of Social Development, but we also see a lot of overspending in that area. The reality on the ground paints a different picture.

The SEED Programme, we were told that there are 7,600 beneficiaries, but under Vote 25, only EC$50,000 allocated, and yet they are still handpicking who gets the benefits. Where is the compassion and empathy in caring for elderly and vulnerable citizens? I want some clarity on some line items where there is overspending.

One area is the Community Self-Help Programme. What is that, because EC$6 million was allocated in 2024, and EC$8 million was spent, and now, another EC$6 million is allocated. I seek detailed clarity on the breakdown of this expenditure, not just a line, a statement, detailed clarity and a proper breakdown.

While we see overspending in ambiguous areas, we are seeing underspending in critical areas. Line item Hurricane Beryl Response, EC$14.5 million allocated, and only EC$4.9 million spent. This is just heartbreaking. Make it make sense. Make it make sense. Madam President, this is the reality, and this reality is not up for debate. It is what it is.

In closing, I want to remind this Chamber, you know, on Tuesday, you know, it was my interpretation that I heard that this Administration is deeply committed to putting the people first, and deeply committed to enhancing healthcare. So if this statement is true, I expect to see a thorough review and reallocation of the healthcare and other budget items in a manner that practically addresses the reality on the ground and the critical needs of our people. Those are real. The needs of our people are real.

We, on "This Side" of the Chamber, are not merely critics, Madam President. We are here to do a job. We are here for the people of this country, and we stand ready to work collaboratively if the Government is serious about delivering impactful results. So allow me to outline a series of concrete, actionable steps that must be done.

- Fully spend the allocated funds with accountability, not at the end of the year, but monitor it quarterly;
- Stock up the shelves in our labs and pharmacies;

- Budget for the appointment of critically needed human resources in the health care sector;
- Immediately attend to the maintenance of broken equipment;
- Freeze the beautiful concept of having a new hospital for now, and prioritise the saving of our broken healthcare system and services. Save it;
- Put primary health care as a priority through reallocation;
- Expedite the rollout of National Health Insurance with a clear and realistic timeline;
- Address the ban on prices of essential healthcare items;
- Consider targeted VAT exemptions for essential medicines and medical supplies;
- As for youth and sports, the whole budget needs to be reviewed, in my humble view, to reflect the needs and aspirations of our younger population;
- As for housing, let us move into realistic deliverables that will respond to the housing shortages throughout the country. If it's a hundred solid houses every year, and I assure you that everyone will be grateful;
- Address the labour force shortage, perhaps with incentives; and
- Support the contracting community with initiatives that will enhance their outputs both quantitatively and qualitatively. Those are the striking forces for any successful housing programme. Get the diaspora involved in innovative housing and creative housing schemes.

Madam President, our pains are many. Our pains are many, and I'm merely touching the surface of what needs to be done. We are now at a juncture where the Government has exhausted its grace period. Yes, they have exhausted their grace period. We have seen three years go by with nothing significant to show for it. We have nine months left in this budget year, with the Government trumpeting large sums yet again, while the people are losing faith. The clock is ticking, and lives are at stake.

Hence, I end with my plea to this Administration, a plea on behalf of every Grenadian. Come back to us at the end of the year with achievements that matter most.

There is no problem in phasing, in reallocation, in increasing budgets, but in my humble opinion, this budget in its current form is a recipe for non-delivery. **(Applause)** Let us do it in unity. Thank you, Madam President. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Madam President: I thank you, Senator Charles. Thank you. Thank you very much, and I offer the floor to Senator David Andrew. Senator, you have the floor, sir.

Sen. the Hon. David Andrew: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, sitting Members of this Honourable House, on "This Side" and on the "Other Side", citizens and friends of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, here at home and in the diaspora, persons here in the Chamber, and I want to particularly acknowledge our staff at the Ministry of Education, friends and well-wishers, friends, family, loved ones, supporters from St. Andrew South East and our students here in the Chamber with us, it's a pleasure to have you as we dissect more into the 2025 Budget Estimates.

Madam President, it's my belief that a journey that starts with conviction is already half way to triumph. This goes for any task we undertake. Therefore, I begin my presentation by placing on record my strong and full support for the National Budget 2025 as presented by the Honourable Leader of Government's Business in "This Place" and by the Minister for Finance in the "Other Place".

The theme, Madam President, which says, "Towards Vision 75: Grenada—Resilient and Rising", is very apt. You see the term resilient is the adjective that comes from resilience, which means or which speaks to the ability of an entity or person animal or whatever to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions, and when we consider how the people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, have been recovering and responding, even through adversities like Beryl, Ivan, 20-plus years ago and all of these adversities, we can't help but recognise how apt the resilient theme is for this budget.

Madam President, I assert that our budget is an estimate, a projection of revenue

and expenditure for the period, usually a year. A budget is a guide. It is not set in stone, so I listened to much of the elaboration and deliberation on the "Other Side" going down to figures, as if that's all there is to it and forgetting the context and forgetting much of the narrative that needs to bring clarity and to bring life to the budget and make it make sense. **(Applause)**

Madam President, so allow me to talk a little bit about the context of this budget, the context in which this budget **(inaudible comment by a Senator)** is being presented, and so I thank my colleague… **(Laughter)** Oops… for presenting us with the context, the context key. Right?

This 2025 Budget is being presented in a time when, according to the Medium-Term Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 2025 and 2027, the real… Right. According to that report, the real GDP has grown by 3.7 % in 2024. **(Applause)** Now, the GDP for our students is the Gross Domestic Product. It is a monetisation, or the monetary value of all goods and services produced within an economy for the period, and this report indicates that it has grown by 3.7% and that happens amidst Beryl, amidst the floods that we had, amidst the excessive rains, amidst all of the things that can ordinarily cause a reduction in production, but it has grown.

The context goes further, and it says the real GDP is forecast to be 4.1% in 2025. **(Applause)** So, the projection looking forward is good too. The report indicates that inflation, which is the general increase in the cost of goods and services, is forecast to be low at 0.9%. You see, we have to recognise, we are dealing in a situation, you live in a world where we have all this international pressure, the geopolitical tensions, the shipping route changing, conflict over the Panama Canal and all of these things that impact upon how we access and how we get goods and services that we depend on in this country, yet for all, the forecast for inflation is projected to be 0.9%. In fact, the report says inflation is forecast to be low at 0.9% over the medium term. A general increase in prices and a fall in purchasing power of money is what inflation is, for the student. Right.

Let's talk about unemployment. That same report puts the context, and it says that unemployment is low at 12% forecast to go lower in 2025. In 2023, I'm reading from

those documents that were presented on Tuesday. In 2023, Grenada saw a notable improvement in unemployment conditions. I'm not saying that, and it's not my perception. It's what's in the report. Unemployment fell to 11.1 % at the end of the fourth quarter of 2023. Of course, the report goes on to point out that disparities between women and men continue to be an issue of concern, and it points out that 15.8% unemployment for women and 7.2 % for men.

Now, that's something that we are duly concerned about, too. I heard the Member on the "Other Side" lament that. That's okay because we are deeply concerned about unemployment, period, and we don't support women being less employed than men. So we hear that, but we recognise that the employment figures are dropping.

But further, it speaks about youth unemployment and how high the figures are, and that might be so, because youth unemployment stands somewhere between the ages of 15 and 24, which is how it is categorised in youth unemployment. I have challenged that with the Minister for Economic Development on a personal point of view because I don't see how we can take people from 15, who are not legally entitled to work and categorise them by international definitions **(applause)** as being unemployed… But we have 15… Look at these young people there, they can't go to work legally, but some of their figures might be calculated inside national youth unemployment figures and being bantered around in this Honourable House. That's something for us to review, but anyhow, youth unemployment, granted that definition, is somewhere about 22%.

But I want us to examine the same youth unemployment figures presented in the recent census and in those same documents in 2020, before the election, before we got into office, youth unemployment was 39.5%, 39.5%. In 2021, before we got into office, it was 38.6%. In 2023, a year after we got into office, it went on to 36% by June. In September, it went down 24%, and by December of 2023, it went on to 22.8%. **(Applause)** Now, I want us to understand. We're talking unemployment, but that's the context in which this budget is set. The youth unemployment figures are going down, and rapidly so, after we've gotten into office. Right.

Madam President, allow me to speak a few things about some of the statements I

heard quickly before I dissect. Education. I heard quite a lot to talk and I wonder where people get their information from. There's no doubt that we had this fiasco a little bit earlier, which you managed quite well, Madam President, because people keep saying stuff and you can't tell where they got it from, inventing their narratives, and discussing it in this Honourable House. This cannot stand. You can't just invent stuff, bring it inside this Honourable House, expect to try to deal with it and waste the people's time, and try to confuse people, and try to mislead people. A lot of that is going on, and this needs to stop in this Honourable House. **(Applause)**

Madam President, I listened to the talk about this Administration promising 500 homes a year and 500 homes a month and people suggesting how many homes we should deliver, in what time. I, at no point, heard or saw anything written about 500 homes a year, a month or anything of that sort. Instead, I know we said that we had a project 500 that we are going to roll out nationally, that programme is currently underway, and, you see, people want to give us timelines.

You see, I think there is a pension on the "Other Side" both in "This Place", here, and in the "Other Place" to tell people when to do, what to do. Pay it now! Pay it right now! **(Laughter)** Pay it immediately! **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Right, so I'm hearing a certain sentiment coming from "That Side" that tells us when to build the houses. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Right? Yes, they want to tell us when to do it, but you see, we have to remember…

So I heard the suggestion coming from the Honourable Member that if we build 100 solid homes a year, then we'll be quite fine. But in the "Other Place", if they had built 100 solid homes a year for the 23 years, we would not have had a housing crisis today. **(Applause) (Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Madam President, all right. So I think I want to… I'll leave the rebuttals, and I want to go to some of my **(laughter)** substantive prepared materials, so that I don't lose too much of my time.

Madam President, as a resident of St. Andrew South East, as a constituent of the eastern district, living in St. Andrew South East, I can't help but thank the Ministry of Social Development.

Madam President: Minister, you are just starting? **(Laughter) (Applause)**

Sen. the Hon. David Andrew: That's what you consider my start, Madam President?

Madam President: Pardon?

Sen. the Hon. David Andrew: Do I need to say good morning? **(Laughter)** All right. Madam President, I'll be happy to have the 10 minutes reversed so that I can get it back. Right

Madam President: Right, wonderful. Proceed.

Sen. the Hon. David Andrew: Madam President, as a resident of St. Andrew South East, I can't help but thank the Ministry of Social and Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs, the Ministry of Mobilisation, Implementation and Transformation and the Ministry of Infrastructure for bringing joy to many of the residents of St. Andrew South East through several projects that I have seen as a resident, in those areas.

Madam President, I can speak of the use of solar lights at the Grenville Bus Terminal at the entry and within the facility. **(Applause)** I can speak of the lighting of the Longwall area in Soubise. **(Applause)**

I can speak of the recreational facility in the Soubise Housing Development area that the residents there have clamoured for, for a long time, and that they are now playing in the evening using the solar lights. **(Applause)** I can speak of the solar lights brought to the playing field of the Crochu R. C. School, properly known as the St. Martin de Porres, where the students, for the first time this year, were able to end their Inter-School Athletics Meet under the lights. **(Applause)**

I can speak of the major lighting that's beginning to happen at the SAASS Playing

Field. I can speak of several of those other serious projects. Thanks to MIT. Thanks to the Ministry of Social and Community Development, constituents are benefiting, and their allocations in the 2024 Budget have gone very well spent.

But not only that, as we speak, there are several other infrastructural projects, thanks to the Ministry of Infrastructure, MIT, and Community Development, the Telescope Primary School Road has commenced. For years, the residents of Telescope have been clamouring for this broken road, and, Madam President, when we started to dig up that road, it was observed that several huge patches of the road had no BRC. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Anyway, so that road is going on, Madam President.

The Fish Market Road to Griffin Lane has been completed. The box drain and pavement behind the SAASS School have been completed. We can talk about the Mahon Hill Road that connects Commissioner Road to Mahon Road, a piece of road that was never done, which is being completed.

I can talk about the slipper drain in Felix Park. I can talk about the slipper drain and drainage on Modeste Hill in Crochu. I can talk about the drainage around the Mamma Cannes Playing Field. The repairs of the community centre in that area, I can speak of that too. I can speak of the footpath that was created in Café. The pavement to residences opposite the entrance of Victoria Park in Grenville. I can talk about the drainage work in Chapel Road in Grenville. I can talk about the guard rails in Crochu and in the area next to the school, St. Martin De Porres. The drain and retaining wall at the entrance of the Crochu school, and I can go on and on, but thanks to the Ministry of Infrastructure, thanks to MIT, thanks to Social Community Development, we were able to get all of these things, bringing joy to our constituents. Thanks. **(Applause)**

As we speak, Madam President, I can happily report that the Marquis Basketball Court has been repaired. We are awaiting the lighting, but last evening, we passed, there were guys playing because the nets are up. I can talk about the repairs to the SAASS Basketball Court that were done, too.

Madam President, thanks to the Ministry of Housing, the Department of Housing, 122 approvals for homes were done, and I see some of the persons who worked closely

with that ministry, to say that happened, and take a bow. Thirty-two of those were completely repaired. Eight full houses were done, and in addition, there are another five in collaboration with MIT. Special thanks to those ministries, because they have collaborated to see people within the St. Andrew South East constituency, I'm a resident of that electoral district, feel a lot happier, and we can talk about bathrooms and toilets, and all of that.

Madam President, I want to take a moment to thank the Prime Minister for his confidence in me to lead the administration of the Education Sector in Grenada. Madam President, many people like to quote figures, and sometimes for the wrong reasons. Today, let me quote some figures that matter.

The 2025 Budget allocation for this country stands at EC$1,912,872,14, and of that, Madam President, the Ministry of Education has been allotted a total of EC$183,398,180, which represents 9.6% of the total budget. Yes. The largest share compared to any other sector—the largest share. Madam President, it is no surprise, you know. This underscores the Government's commitment to education, to the upliftment and improvement of people's lives, in human resources through education and training.

So people are talking about figures, and we talk about EC$8 million, and like that's the end of the budget. The largest portion of the budget was given to education, and that signals something. It's a signal that these young people are very important. **(Applause)** It signals that what we do for the future of our nation is important. Madam President, this is a transformational shift. We cannot, and will not as a Government, keep doing the same old thing and expect different results. **(Applause)**

You see, I hear a lot of chatter, Madam President, about where is the FLY, and where is the this that was there before, and all of that. Madam President, it's as if some people have forgotten that there is a new administration with a new policy direction having been given a different mandate, a new mandate, something different that they gave us, the people of Grenada, gave this Administration a mandate to fulfil. **(Applause)** **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** New lenses. Thank you, and so we don't want to go back to the same thing that people rejected and put more of that for them, but you see,

some people are not living a reality.

Madam President, ever since this Government took office in 2022, we have made some bold decisions, understanding that there must be a drastic shift in the education sector. Some of these decisions I've already reported on, the approval of the free tuition programme, the introduction of TVET to primary schools or the expansion, the introduction of coding in schools, universal secondary education, but there are others, and other areas which deserve their own recognition.

Digital Transformation, Madam President. The Ministry of Education remain steadfast in its commitment to leverage the technology to improve the delivery of education across the nation. Over the past year, there have been numerous activities aligned with digital transformation to the benefit of our students and educators.

E-testing—the e-testing expansion. For the first time, Madam President, all 21 secondary schools successfully conducted online CSEC multiple choice exams in all 28 subject areas, with the exception of Math and English. So it would have been 30 if we had Math and English. The numbers are too huge, and based on capacity constraints, we have to look at that. Probably, we can do that for next year when CXC allots a whole day to do Math and a whole day to do English. But for now, all 28 other subjects have been done online through electronic means for the first time in 2024. **(Applause)**

Additionally, Madam President, 20 primary schools utilised e-testing for the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment exams, advancing our goal for a fully digital assessment framework. Remember, e-testing at the primary level started in 2023, with a pilot of 3 schools. Yes? The primary school students started doing their exams online in 2023; three schools. In 2024, we went on to add another 17 schools, and now, we are budgeted to have an additional 20 schools, bringing it up to 40 by the end of 2025. That is progress. That is transformation. That is advancement.

Madam President, Numeracy and Literacy. We have been conducting trials with 235 students and 12 teachers on three specialised numeracy and literacy software programs that are very interactive. We are now in the process of full procurement to enhance foundational learning: Nearpod, IXL Learning, and Wordwall. They are very

interactive, student-centred, and students are exposed at their own pace to do literacy, numeracy, and this we hope can be part of the solution. Once we get through the pilot phases, we'll be able to assess, analyse and move that into the broader education system.

Expansion of coding in schools continues to happen. This year, we launched the "Restore a Sense of I Can", the RSC Tech Club, expanding coding programmes from 7 to 17 schools, with an additional four schools to be added in the coming months. This exposes people to virtual reality, augmented reality, drone technologies and all of these current skill sets that are required for efficiency and working in today's world.

Education Management Information System. The long-anticipated EMIS went live in nine pilot schools in November 2024, with expansion to other schools this year.

Information Technology Infrastructure Enhancement. The ministry developed an IT curriculum guide for lower secondary schools, ensuring a structured approach to ICT education. Additionally, 100 computers and projectors were procured and distributed to all 21 public secondary schools as part of the ICT and digital transformation.

Plans for 2025, there's going to be a smartening of several classrooms. In fact, in collaboration with the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, the NTRC and the Universal Service Fund, the ministry will introduce Smart Classrooms featuring virtual and augmented reality tools, along with interactive Smart Boards in nine schools, two primary and seven secondary, starting in March of 2025. **(Applause)** TAMCC also benefited from this gesture with the NTRC to have a hybrid telecommunications upgrade to classrooms, where classes can be streamed. This was done sometime at the end of last year.

Madam President, the Learning Management System (LMS), EC$150,000 has been budgeted this year. Following consultations, work has begun on piloting the Learning Management System as a central hub for content delivery and learning resource accessibility to teachers and students. Madam President, for the first time we have allocated EC$700,000 for the creation of a Production and Animation Centre; now, this centre will use modern technologies like drones and digital software to develop

animations that enhance curriculum delivery, support ministry programmes and, provide a more dynamic learning experience, in a step towards integrating innovation into our Education System and preparing students for the future.

TVET and Skills Development, Madam President. When we drive our cars, if there's a problem with them, we need a skilled person, a mechanic. When we have our homes and the pipes break, we need a plumber, and if we don't have the skilled people to provide those services, we'll be left behind. Technology and innovation, those things move fast, and if our people aren't trained to keep up, we too will be left behind; already, we have taken steps to bid this cap, Madam President.

In 2024, Home Economics and Woodwork were expanded into 24 primary schools, while an itinerant model was used for an additional 11 schools. In other words, these people with training in skills and technical education go to different schools when the schools cannot come to a centre, but they'll go to those schools, benefiting over 1,883 students.

Madam President, the OECS Skills and Innovation Project. This US$15 million regional initiative involves a collaboration between the Government of Grenada, the Government of St. Lucia, and the OECS Commission. Over the next five years, we'll see two institutions benefiting significantly from the funds allocated there, TAMCC and NEWLO. They will benefit from various initiatives, including equipment purchase, laboratory repairs and upgrades, staff training, grants for business innovation ideas, and so on. I am pleased, Madam President, on this note, to report that we launched this programme last week, and we are weeks away from further implementation.

Madam President, we can talk about the Compulsory School Legislation; this legislation took effect on the 1st of September 2024, reinforcing this Government's commitment to ensuring that all our students, all our nation's children, have access to programmes which will prepare them for the workforce. We continue to put systems in place to fully operationalise, and we will provide as much support as possible for students through TVET and other interventions.

So plans for 2025, as it's budgeted for, to institute a skills training committee, to

further develop TVET pathways and monitor the progress towards planned outcomes, that is on the cards, to establish four centres of excellence and that was part of our plan, Madam President, to address the shortfalls in the products of the education system and the requirements they need in the world of work.

Those centres are being targeted, Tourism and Hospitality, and let me say, we've already engaged the stakeholders in the industry: Sandals, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Hotel and Tourism, Hospitality Industry, all of these players, TAMCC, NEWLO, they've all been involved in those discussions, the tourism and hospitality facility, and agriculture.

We have started repairs to the Mirabeau Farm School because we want it to be a Centre for Modern Agriculture where we can train young people in agriculture, and that too will help with the issue of food security. It will help in ensuring that we have younger persons coming into agriculture with modern techniques to support our self-sustainability.

We also focus on marine and fisheries, and here the T. A. Marryshow Community College, the Carriacou campus, is being targeted for this facility, and we are already in consultation with the principal and the council at the college to discuss the concepts, the designs, and that's an ongoing work. We also planned to do furniture making.

As we know, we already have furniture-making facilities in Snell Hall that were introduced under the former administration, but the trading component never took place, and we are going to ensure that we expand the capabilities in that facility **(applause)** to do trading and to start training there. A total of EC$9 million, Madam President, has been allocated for those centres.

Curriculum Development, Madam President. Last year we talked about the introduction of history, Grenadian history, in our schools, and I'm still happy about that because we have lots of students who are now having a re-energised view and perspective about history, seeing Grenadian history being taught in upper primary, lower secondary, with a curriculum developed for it as well. Once again, we have retained an EC$500,000 allocation for this year's curriculum development budget.

I listened to plenty of the noise, Madam President, but not much is being done

and we have to recognise, in many respect we are correcting 15 or even 20 years of systemic inadequacies in pedagogy, sometimes in ancient design, we're taking slow and we are sluggish to respond to the changes because as humans, we are creatures of habit, but we are committed to doing this.

Madam President, I want to take a look at the issue of Mathematics. Many people are becoming extremely concerned with the recent World Bank proclamation in an article about the dire nature of Caribbean Education regarding Math and English, which is where we stand. Truth be told, this is not a new phenomenon. It's not something that has just come around the corner. If we go back several decades, we will see we've had several challenges, and this is nothing new. What the World Bank is saying is not something that we don't know, and it's not something that this Administration has not articulated.

It is why we are realigning and repositioning skills in the education system. It is why we are refocusing and re-strategising for Math. It is why several things are being done within education to make sure that the products of the education system meet the demands of the world of work.

Madam President, I just want to go back to the last 16 years. The last 16 years in Grenada, the average pass rate in CSEC Math was 39.8%. For the last 16 years, the average pass rate at CSEC was 39%. In 2024, the pass rate was 31.7%, within the range. In those 16 years, we have had years like:

- In 2009 – 38.1%;
- In 2012 – 32.3%;
- In 2017 – 35.6%;
- In 2021 – 34.9%; and
- In 2024 – 31.7%.

The highest percentage over the last 16 years was 56.4% in 2014. Nothing to shout about because we still have 44% of our persons passing even in that year. Right? But the point is, Madam President, these things did not just surface. Many of these things are systemic, and we recognise that the problems didn't just start, but we know that we have to fix them, and we know we have to fix them now, so we will fix them. Yes.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable David Andrew

There are those who spend time criticising, finding every problem, and looking at the glass half empty, more than half full, so they're looking for the next problem rather than looking for the next opportunity to build, but that's okay. We know why we are here, we know why we are in government, and why the people put us here. **(Applause)**

Madam President, they're those who spend time criticising this Government for not providing bus fares in addition to the situation. It's obvious that their vision remains as short as a lunchtime break **(laughter)**, completely missing the bigger picture, because if you could say the bus fare… You're paying EC$810, which is the single biggest fee that somebody would have to pay to advance their education, and you criticise that because the bus fare is not provided. Listen, paying this fee has nothing to do with who you support, who your parents like, or what political affiliation. Tout moun bagay; that's it.

So, I heard a talk about not politicising. Well, this Ministry of Education doesn't politicise, when it comes to these opportunities, all Grenadians get it **(applause)**, and we don't select, like what was read by our Honourable Colleague here from the documents, we don't select and wait on the minister's approval, to allow you to get this or to allow you to get that as for everybody.

In fact, students have been attempting several subjects, 15 and 16 subjects, and that's a matter the ministry is going to look at, and so I'm soundly noticed that we will review the practice of doing 16 and 17 subjects, so you have so much width and no depth. We need to focus more correctly on fundamental areas and reduce the number of subjects that students do so that the SBA load becomes lower, and you can focus more in-depth on areas that matter.

Madam President, here are some of the plans. Recognising the challenges in mathematics and the performances there, the ministry will host a National Math Symposium. Currently, we are conducting research, analysing and assessing all of the math performances over the years. We have engaged one of our research officers, Doctor Martin, and he is collating the information to inform what we do, how we prepare, and then we'll go to you, the public. We'll come to persons who are retired Math Professors, retired Math Teachers, persons who have an interest, persons from the

diaspora, and we will begin to shape that conversation around mathematics, what we do and how we address it, because this is a national concern. It's not just for the Ministry of Education, shaping the best practices that are going to come.

An entire math strategy is going to be prepared, you can expect that with a number of different interventions, from early intervention and interactive software, to training of teachers, to specialised teaching of mathematics at the primary level, so that only persons who have genuine competence in mathematics will teach mathematics throughout the primary school.

As is in several schools, one teacher teaches everything, and sometimes even if they don't have competency in math, they are still forced to do it or they are still made to do it. That needs to change. It's currently being reviewed, and we will address that hopefully for the coming school year, including Math Labs, additional training—all things you can expect.

Madam President, every primary school in Grenada will benefit from the Digital OECS Harmonised Primary Curriculum, and I've had the privilege of being briefly toured through it, I see some of my officers up there who facilitated that brief tour through it, where there is a regional OECS strategy and a regional OECS Digital Harmonised Primary Curriculum that is being made available to our teachers. They can access resources, content, all of that. The implementation of this new curriculum has already begun with 12 schools across Grenada, seven educational districts, ensuring that our students are being equipped with the skills they need to succeed in an evolving world.

Madam President, moreover, Grenada is one of only four OECS Member States that was recently approved for an EC$10 million transformation grant, [7]STG from the Global Partnership for Education, a game-changing initiative, in the education reform. Grenada is said to receive US$2.5 million, that's over EC$6.5 million, to support the improvements in our education system.

One of the top priorities under this initiative is the successful implementation of an

[7] System Transformation Grant

enhanced curriculum and assessment strategy for lower secondary. To achieve this, we intend to reduce the number of subjects offered at the form's one and two and even the higher levels to ensure that there's a limit, a cap on the number of students would write, standardised curricular at this level, for all public schools, ensuring consistency across the board, introduce courses aligned with the vision of the ideal Grenadian student, including civics, life skills, and other value-based curriculum, because education is not just about exams, Madam President, it's about shaping a holistic and well-rounded, responsible Grenadian citizen.

Madam President, I'm not done yet; the Free Tuition Programme will continue in 2025, with an allocation of EC$1.5 million. Now, I've heard the voices on the "Other Side" claiming that we've cut the programme funds this year, and you see, a lot of talk was done about, what was cut, what was cut and what figure was reflected as less in the budget, but you see, responsible governance and prudent fiscal management, **(applause)** begs that if you allocated EC$10 million for something, and you realise due to efficiency, grants or savings, you are able to do it for EC$3 million less, would you go back and budget 10 more? No. Some people call it corruption savings. **(Laughter) (Inaudible comment by Senators)**

Madam President, in fact, we made more… Let me make sure I got that right. Yes. We did not reduce the funds because we don't care, as some would suggest. Right? In fact, we made more funds available in 2024 to ensure that we meet our commitments to citizens. After reviewing the uptake and spending, we recognised that there was not a need to keep the allocation, so we repurposed it, and so there is a Student Reimbursement Programme that we have been allocated funds for so that these students can be reimbursed either up to 50% or 100% of the fees they pay for doing CSEC subjects, if they pass in a certain key set of areas; Math, English included Math, English with skill or Math, English with a Foreign Language…

There are some key areas, and you will be more informed, so if you do the Modern Languages, if you do the Agricultural Science, if you do the Information Technology, if you do a skill, and you pass those, you will be reimbursed. Funds have been redirected

for that. **(Applause)** We want to encourage you, yes, to do Mathematics, to do English and pass them; to do a skill, because that's where the world is heading, and we will outline to you what those skills are to ensure that we encourage you. If you pass five, including a certain number of skills and the base, you get back your full 100%. Well, you get back up to eight passes because the ministry doesn't think there's a great need to do many more than that, but that's another conversation.

Furthermore, Madam President, we heard some talking about the dropout rates at TAMCC and NEWLO in relation to the free tuition and the unavailability of bus fare. Madam President, with your leave, I'll be happy to distribute these to Members of the House, so that I can deliberate and show you what the facts are, not old talk, but what the facts are. So… Could you help me?

Madam President: Is this the schedule of bus fees?

Sen. the Hon. David Andrew: No. It has to do with the enrolment, the dropout, and the retention rate at TAMCC for the last six years, and I want to point that out, Madam President. So with your leave, you see, because lots of persons have been saying and they've come into this Honourable House and have said, that the free tuition is a failed policy initiative to TAMCC because more persons are withdrawing and dropping out of TAMCC than before, that is a flagrant misrepresentation of the truth. If I were on the block, I would say they….. Madam President, but I know you **(inaudible comment)**.

But, Madam President, so I looked at these figures, and I wanted to point out that this document contains the enrolment and withdrawal numbers from 2019 to 2025. So, 2019 to 2020, one school year, 2020 to 2021, 2021 to 2022, 2022 to 2023, 2023 to 2024 and 2024 to 2025; and I want to just go through the enrolment figures at TAMCC for those years.

In 2019 to 2020, 1,922. In 2020 to 2021, that's before we got into office, 1,944. In 2021 to 2022, the election year, 2,086. In 2022 and 2023, 1,946. In 2023 to 2024, 2,080. In 2024 to 2025, 2,170. **(Applause)** Now, I wanted to point out that the enrolment is

trending upward based on these figures. It's trending upwards consistently.

But let's look at the withdrawals; the withdrawals, Madam President, for the same period, in 2019, before we got into office, were 253, and that's official and unofficial withdrawals from TAMCC, 253. In 2020 to 2021 was 202. In 2021 to 2022, and by the way, that's the year, the enrolment, before we got into office, was 2,086; we had the highest rate of dropouts, 513. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** No man. **(Laughter)** 2021 to 2022, 513. In 2022 to 2023, it was 117, mark that reduction. **(Applause)** Mark that reduction, 117. In 2023 to 2024, 156 and in 2024 to 2025, 70.

Now, I point these figures out because I want the records to be clear, Madam President. As far as we are concerned, the free tuition policy and our interventions at the level of TAMCC so that these young minds can get easier access to continued education are working **(applause)** because we see that the enrolments are increasing, the dropouts are decreasing and the students who stay and complete, which is the third column, continues to increase from 1,669 to 2,057. **(Applause)**

The people on the "Other Side", in the "Other Place", and on the "Other Side" of this House, who want to perpetuate these falsehoods, must stop it. The calypsonians will say, "Them have to stop that". **(Applause)**

Madam President, School Infrastructure. Madam President, if some had their way, they would pretend that Hurricane Barrel was just a breeze, yes, a light breeze. Apparently, acknowledging reality is the new norm. But, Madam President, let's be serious. When a category four hurricane barrels through, leaving damage in its wake, it's not an excuse; it's a reality, and that reality we had to face head-on.

The passing of Hurricane Beryl brought several challenges, particularly to our schools in the north of the island, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. Schools were damaged, communities were ravaged and disrupted, and families were left picking up the pieces.

In the face of this adversity, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Infrastructure and other entities, mobilised resources to secure the well-being of our teachers, students, and schools. Funding was redirected or repurposed. So you see,

sometimes, when you see a figure that is not the same, there's something in budgeting that you'll repurpose funds. We had to repurpose some funds and redirect some funds to take care of 14 schools that were affected by Hurricane Beryl because of the priority we put into education.

So, Madam President, I'll point out that a school like Mac Donald College, where they were significant damage, just over half a million dollars was spent. EC$550,000 was spent in major repairs to that school, suffering loss, roof reconstruction, sealing and electrical installation, refurbishment of the auditorium, tuck shop and technical wings. Right. Money was also spent to do less major repairs at the Grenada SDA Comprehensive School, located in Mount Rose.

In Carriacou and Petite Martinique, Madam President, the devastation was much worse. Schools were more extensively damaged, and in the case of Dover Government, it was completely destroyed. The Ministry of Education, in response, collaborated with other ministries to ensure that, as of the 30th of September, Madam President, one month after the due opening of school, all schools in Carriacou were able to open their doors and to accommodate students for the continuation of education. **(Applause)**

As we speak today, the post-Beryl repairs are about 90% to 95% complete. Not only did we do those things, Madam President, but we supplied furniture to the tune of about 48,000 new furniture for the schools, because we understood lots of them disappeared in some cases, and we understand what happens in those cases, three deep freezers, five refrigerators, and five cookers to ensure that the Feeding Programme was maintained.

Madam President, in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, as part of the response to Beryl, we introduced a Breakfast Programme specifically for the first term, the Michaelmas in 2024, just to ease the strain and difficulties that some parents were facing, so that they have one thing less to worry about.

Additionally, Madam President, in Carriacou alone, we worked along with 11 merchants to provide essentials for school uniform assistance and school supplies in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, totalling EC$210,000 in vouchers to parents of Carriacou

and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)**

Madam President, education is not just about books and exams, but it's about the holistic well-being of individuals, and so there was a psychosocial intervention too. We partnered with the Ministry of Social Development, and we partnered with UNICEF. Our counsellors from the Ministry of Education led the charge, and we met with students, in some cases teachers, and we met with school communities to do the Return to Happiness Programme and ensured that the psychosocial well-being of the students was looked after.

Madam President, not only that, we also remembered the students from Carriacou and Petite Martinique who wanted to continue their TAMCC education, with the campus being significantly damaged on the mainland, and so they were incentivised. And so through an education care package, we provided 90 students with much needed assistance, 90 students from Carriacou who continued their education on the mainland; we provided care packages totalling a budget of EC$2 million further in the initial pay out, Madam President, EC$222,000 over that was paid and that entails, the first payment of EC$3,700, which included EC$2,000 for meals and transportation, EC$500 dollars for uniforms, because all TAMCC students need to wear their shirts, their jerseys and all of that, EC$1200 for textbooks and also, Madam President, a brand new laptop to facilitate their research and development. **(Applause)** This support we know will continue for the next 10 months, and that EC$2 million is budgeted to facilitate all that I've just talked about continuing for them.

Madam President: Is this for the victims of Beryl—Carriacou only, or is it within the cross of the education system?

Sen. the Hon. David Andrew: No, that's for people from Carriacou and Petite Martinique. It's a response to support families in Carriacou and Petite Martinique who needed to send their children to continue their education, but to ease the pressure, we had this TAMCC care package done.

So, plans for 2025. Despite these setbacks, Madam President, seven new schools will be constructed and existing schools will be expanded at an estimated cost of about EC$75 million. One of the first major projects on the agenda is the construction of a brand new St. David's Catholic Secondary School, which will be relocated from its current location to Marlmount in St. David. **(Applause)** The Anglican School in Grenville, the St. Andrews Anglican School that has already been contracted and signed, and it's due to have groundbreaking in the next few days, my anticipation is. These two schools, Madam President, are part of the Grenada Education Enhancement Project (GRIP) of the Ministry of Education, funded by the Caribbean Development Bank.

Other new schools that will be treated with is the St. Giles Anglican Primary School in Mt. Camel, St. Andrew. The Florida Government School has already been tendered, so we will see action a lot sooner. The Calliste Government, and, in fact, as we speak, there are some repairs taking place to Calliste, the installation of air conditioning units to ensure that the dust that is prevalent in that area at that time of year doesn't affect our students and the teaching population there. Madam President, JW Fletcher will also undergo expansion, and there are others.

Madam President, I want to pass to the Healthy Start Nutrition Programme. Madam President, in 2024, this Government decided to remove all fees from the Healthy Start Nutrition Programme, previously called the School Feeding Programme, ensuring that every child has access to a hot meal, a nutritious meal at no cost to the families, and people lamented about that.

Initially, EC$3.5 million was allocated for this programme, but guess what, we swiftly recognised that we needed a supplementary budget, Madam President, so we had to get supplemental income and bring the expenditure on that programme to EC$5 million in 2024. Now, that is overspending too, but I didn't hear much talk about it on the "Other Side", that's overspending too, but you know what that's doing, it's feeding our nation's children. Yes. **(Applause)** It's feeding our nation's children. These funds, Madam President, covered the purchase of meat, dried goods, and the distribution of vouchers to schools, supplementing the fees that schools would ordinarily have collected from parents

or students.

Madam President, now they are those who made plenty of noise last year because some schools experienced some delays in receipt of vouchers, or some suppliers didn't have chicken or didn't have rice or something of the sort, problems that we didn't have very much control over in some cases. Madam President, but you know what they say about barrels and noise, but there was a lot of noise, but I am not here to talk about barrels or noise, but I will say this.

When you expand a programme, Madam President, I acknowledge students again. I thank them very much for gracing us with their presence. Yes. **(Laughter)** Madam President, when you expand the programme to reach 16,400 students monthly, when you expand the programme to feed 16,400 in 2024, increasing it by nearly 5,000 beneficiaries, there must be some logistical issues, and some logistics will arise and some people will hop on it looking at a glass half full and say, "Well, this school got something late that one this"… But this is not inefficiency and mismanagement; that is growth. That is growth because when the programme feeds 5,000 more beneficiaries, a lot more people benefit. So the budget for this period continues to be EC$5 million as we work towards increasing the programme, continue to feed the numbers, but also to work in collaboration with farmers and local producers to ensure that we work with the farmers and get local produce.

Madam President, Regularisation. Before I go to that, I want to appeal to our school here. We can use our school gardens. Let's use our school gardens to supplement these programmes. **(Applause)** I am appealing to the community people, farmers, and parents. Let's support the School Feeding Programme with local produce as far as we can, because our students, our children, will benefit from it.

Madam President, Teacher Regularisation. I want to report that in 2023, we began the teacher regularisation process with 111 teachers in batch one regularised. In 2024, batch two, with 247 teachers. We submitted for regularisation, or started the regularisation process, and we anticipate that within this year, that will be competed and formalised.

Further, we want to put on record, Madam President, that in 2024, we hired 148 new teachers and reappointed 506, ensuring that our students are staffed with professionals to continue pouring into the lives of our students. Madam President, for the first time, EC$400,000 is allocated to support our professional development for teachers and even ministry staff. This investment ensures that continuous training will enhance the delivery of classroom instruction and education management within the sector.

Madam President, I moved his scholarships. This Government, in 2024, awarded 217 scholarships at a whopping cost of EC$82.1 million to Grenadians. **(Applause)** 217 to ordinary Grenadians. **(Applause)** Even the Leader of Opposition Business, in the "Other Place", offspring, was on that list. That's to tell how we are impartial with the delivery of scholarships in the Ministry of Education. 217 Grenadians. Right? **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)**

Of course, because they are Grenadians, and I want to point that out **(applause)** because every Grenadian that meets the criteria, regardless of their affiliation politically, geographically, socio-economically, they would benefit and not those who come to a particular party office or those who got a particular place or no particular minister. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Thank you very much.

Madam President, so we thank our… And these areas include things like medicine and law, which previously, by policy under the previous administration, were not allowed to be supported by scholarship, medicine and law, we have changed this since we've come, and so persons are able to benefit from medicine and law scholarships now **(applause)**

I can't help, Madam President, but talk about the First-Generation Scholarship opportunity, which is a huge topic among many. This is an opportunity that targets persons in families where nobody has gone to university before, and that person will be the first person, the first generation to get a scholarship opportunity. The Government, in partnership with Monroe University, will provide a 100% sponsorship for studies in the areas that the college provides.

To date, in February, we launched that programme with already 32 scholarship awardees receiving their awards and commencing studies. The additional 18 will be given, we anticipated by April, to complete the first cohort of 50, and in September 2025, we have an additional cohort of 50, and every year thereafter, we want to target 50 additional Grenadians, first-generation, as we move closer and closer to having a Grenadian university graduate in every household. **(Applause)** Right.

What's happening inside the Scholarship Desk? We have budgeted EC$120,000 in 2025 for the digitisation of our records to make accessing, finding and retrieving our information a lot easier.

Madam President, Early Childhood Education. This is a huge one. We have allocated over EC$100,000 for early childhood development, but I want to say here, we recognise that early childhood development is critical for developing the education system as appropriately as it's supposed to be. Madam President, I realised my time **(time bell rings)** is right on the bell. **(Laughter)** Can I… Can I beg, respectfully, for 15 minutes to wrap up my presentation? **(Inaudible comment by Madam President)** Can I get 10 minutes, Madam President?

Madam President: You have it.

Sen. the Hon. David Andrew: Thank you, **(laughter)** Madam President, for your grace. So we are keen. We are currently reviewing the early childhood education policy because we recognise that if we get it right at early childhood, if we get the correct stimulation, if we get the correct phonetic skills, if you get the correct attitude from early, the correct values from early we would have less fight up to do, less programmes to make let's FLY **(applause)**, and less roach and less crocodile. **(Applause)** Right. Madam President, I know there has been significant training and the ECD policy revision, all of which is going on there.

Library Services. Madam President, the development of our library is now under another ministry, but the modernisation of community libraries is something that we have

an interest in, and so this year we have allocated EC$350,000 upgrade the infrastructure in those libraries. We've already started digitising some of the equipment and doing the infrastructural development that is required to accommodate them into computers. In 2024, we have been procured for them, and we also want to do training for the staff.

Madam President, the Multiplier Grant. I am proud to announce that Grenada is receiving a co-financing boost through the Global Partnership for Education GP Multiplier Grant. It was announced during the 2024 Budget reading, and finally, we have the paperwork to go with it. The entire project is worth over EC$13 million, just over US$5 million. With a budget of EC$3.1 million allocated for 2025, this funding will support Grenada's Education Enhancement Project, phase two, across three key components: expanding support for students with special needs through inclusive education; strengthening early childhood education for a solid learning foundation; and enhancing leadership, teaching and school oversight for better outcomes.

Madam President, I could go on and on, but appreciating the grace that you bestowed on me, I believe the message is clear. This 2025 Budget, Madam President, reflects our unwavering commitment as a Government to the future of education in Grenada. It is not just numbers or allocations. We are shaping the future, we are shaping the future of Grenada. We are laying foundations, and, you see, a lot of times when we lay foundations, Madam President, you don't see it, so I hear people asking where's the new project and where is the… Because we have a mind-set that the only things that matter are concrete, steel and things that you probably could see physically. You know, what I call psychology? Concrete operational thinking **(applause)**, which is one of the levels of thought.

Madam President, we are shaping the future of our children, we are empowering our educators and investing in sustainable systems that will grow. I stand here, therefore reforming my support for this budget and my absolute confidence in this Government's vision, but it's not just a Government effort, Madam President, it's a national effort, and I call on this Honourable House and every citizen across Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, across this country, to continue investing in our nation's education for long-

term growth.

Before I close, Madam President, I want to take the opportunity to thank God for his goodness. See, last night I saw a post from an educator and the post said, "People in authority are treated by ordinary persons as if they have no lives, they don't get tired, they don't sleep, they don't hurt, they have no emotions, but they are called upon to help 24/7, anytime, every day. And when I heard it, I said, "Lord, this person understands the work that some of us in this space understand all too well".

But I'm saying all this to say that within the last two and a half, almost three, God has been good to me. I have not gotten sick, Madam President, not once. I'm still clothed in my right mind. My family is still fine. I thank God for them, too. So I must thank God for his goodness. Thank you for the opportunity.

I want to thank my Prime Minister for the confidence he has demonstrated in me to give me the mandate to charge the affairs of Education, one that I take wholeheartedly because my children are in the education system too and I will not fail the education system if for no other reason my children are in it, but I have all the more reason and several other reasons not to fail it, but I thank him for his confidence and my colleagues.

I want to especially thank my team at the Ministry of Education, a very dedicated, professional, and competent team. Yes. You can go ahead and knock the table for them. **(Applause)** When I speak as minister, I know I have the backing of my team at the Ministry of Education, and I watch how they support whatever we set out to do wholeheartedly, even sometimes under difficult circumstances, even sometimes when not everything is idle like when you are repairing and retailing and removing the carpet from the ministry, the way they stood when the AC units were not working they stood and got the work done. **(Applause)** I appreciate all of you; PSs, staff, heads of department, all of you. Your Minister of Education appreciates you, appreciates the work you do for our nation, for our nation's system. Thank you very much. **(Applause)**

Madam President, I want to thank all of our educators, our teachers, and principals. We can say a lot, but the 20-something thousand students that we have every day going to the schools are in the care of our principals and teachers, and while we can talk a lot

about what needs to be better, and how it needs to be better, these people take care of them every day to the best of their abilities. I want to shout out my principals, teachers, educators, cooks, auxiliary staff and all those who work to keep a clean environment within our school sector for the good of our nation's children and to all stakeholders, both local, regional and international, the UNICEF, the GP, the Caribbean Development Bank and all the other agencies with which we collaborate to ensure that education goes on.

Madam President, I want to thank every individual who continues to be left in the transformative power of education. Madam President, as someone who spent most of my years and all of my years working in the psychosocial field, I understand deeply the importance of holistic education that nurtures the mind, body and spirit. This vision, rooted in care for the whole person, the whole child, is what guides us as we move forward. I therefore invite all, including those who spend more of their time criticising, to play their part in our nation's children's education. Education, like tourism, is everybody's business. **(Applause)**

There are some who say that education is what one retains after he or she forgets what was learned in school. We know, too, that education prepares students not for exams or a test, but for life and for living, and all of us have a part to play in that. As a Government and as a Ministry of Education, we are committed, Madam President, to doing our part. It is evident in being allocated the hugest part of the 2025 Budget Estimates. This is evident in the priority that the Government and the Ministry of Education are placing on education. We, as a Government, will continue to do our part, and so it's in this context, Madam President, that I give my full, unequivocal support and endorsement to the budget statement as presented. Thank you very much. **(Applause)**

Madam President: I thank the Senator, Minister for Education. I'm a little bit excited about the decrease in the dropout rate, and you said that you have a programme, I think it's an IT Programme, that goes to the students if the students cannot come to wherever it's happening. I think that's very innovative and important. It might also have an impact on the dropout or the graduation rate in secondary schools, or at whatever level

you attain. So, I hope some of these successes can be repeated under the 2025 Budget and that you will pay attention to what you did not accomplish in 2024 as well. Those are my little commentaries.

May I propose, dear colleagues, that we break for lunch? We failed to get to where we wanted to be at the end of the morning, and before I talk with that, I think she's stepped out of the room, but I want to thank Senator Charles for her retraction and her continuation. Please convey that to her, Senator Cox, and I thank Senator Francis for her participation in our consultation with dignity and grace and for her start of the props this morning. **(Laughter)** Thank you for bringing keys and glasses **(laughter)**, and we're not sure what we're going to see after lunch. When we resume after lunch, because we have missed someone in the morning, Senator Joseph, if you are willing to accept this, we will have to start with Senator André Lewis, if that would work, but you have lunch to renegotiate, but when I come, we'll start about two… You will? Yes? Senator Dwight Horsford, you want the floor, sir?

Sen. the Hon. Dwight Horsford: Thank you, Madam President. I already indicated to my friends at the opposite, and my colleague to my left, that I prefer after luncheon period to go.

Madam President: I would like you to use your voice to match your size. I couldn't hear you. **(Laughter)**

Sen. the Hon. Dwight Horsford: Well, I was saying that I indicated to my friend opposite and to my distinguished friend on my left that after the luncheon period, I would prefer to go rather than Senator Gloria.

Madam President: I see. All right. Thank you. We will have you first. Enjoy lunch, everyone. Thank you to the… I cannot dismiss for lunch without saying how excited this Parliament is to hear the results of the collaboration in the ministry. I hope

I'm speaking as an observer, and really to thank you for coming this morning. Thank you all very much. Delighted. Delighted. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Senate adjourned for lunch at 1:12 p.m.

Senate resumed at 2:25 p.m.

Madam President: I trust you enjoyed your lunch, and we will continue presentations under the Motion. I believe the request that is coming to the floor is coming from Senator the Honourable Dwight Horsford. You have the floor, sir.

Sen. the Hon. Dwight Horsford: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I hope you can hear me.

Madam President: I can't now, thank you.

Sen. the Hon. Dwight Horsford: So, the voice matches the size? Madam President, much of my task, much of my duty on "Our Side" of the Chamber is made a lot easier for me by my distinguished sister, Senator the Honourable Dr. Myanna Charles who went before me, in what I can honestly say, is a very, for the time given to us, is very comprehensive and impactful budget response, and I pay tribute to her for that. Unfortunately, Madam President, she had to depart the Chamber on other business, but I associate myself totally with her contribution and the spirit of her delivery.

Madam President, I also want to thank you for your indulgence as I was abroad when our Sitting started. I understand that the Clerk communicated to, and you communicated to my colleagues, that it was difficult for me to make the first Sitting, so I did my utmost best to be here today.

I've considered the 2025 Budget as was presented by a reluctant Minister of Finance on the 7th March 2025. What I propose to do, Madam President, in the circum context of what I said just now, is to avoid repeating emphasis in areas that both my

distinguished friends, Senators Cox and Doctor Charles, have ably analysed. I wish to make a few global observations and three specific ones.

The budget statement or budget communication, Madam President, is supposed to outline the Government's fiscal plans and economic forecast and to explain the policies and programmes for economic growth and stability over the incoming fiscal period or the medium term, so that the budget is not just about presenting figures about plans of expenditure in programme areas, but it is the primary document of any Government in our system to communicate to the nation the developmental agenda of the Government and to explain it, if not to synopsise, to summarise those policy objectives and how they are to be achieved by public expenditure.

So the whole objective of the budget communication in our democratic system is to inform the public to whom the obligation of dutiful services owed and the Parliament so that Government remains accountable to the people. In short, Madam President, this budget exercise is not just about figures and analysing figures, it's about transparency. There must be no smoke and mirrors.

The Budget 2025 is formulated within the Fiscal Resilience Act, 2023. I will make a brief mention of this later on, very shortly. Before the Fiscal Resilience Act, there was the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which required tight reins on Government spending, Government expenditure, an important threshold, limitations and requirements on borrowing and prudent fiscal management.

Now, many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and even political divide would have attempted economic analyses of this budget. How I approach this, Madam President, is that inasmuch as the input in a budget is largely informed by technocrats and technical people with very special skills and knowledge in economic modelling and planning and so on, a budget must be intelligible to those who have to absorb it and understand it.

And so, Madam President, as far as I'm concerned, table one on page nine of the 2025 Budget provides, in my view, a tabular representation of the key variables of the 2025 Budget. That tabular representation is what the Government has come up with,

albeit late in the day and nearing constitutional deadlines for presenting it.

Now, the overall deficit of EC$337.4 million is projected. This deficit is proposed to be financed, from my analysis here, from drawdown from domestic reserves somewhere over EC$283 million, supposedly, supposedly, and perhaps largely from CBI funds. So it would appear that just about EC$49.8 million in new funds will be required to be borrowed. The Government is telling us… It's important that we're looking at this. The Government is telling us that over the stated period, the year 2027, the fiscal and economic situation will be such that the overall balance will be contributing to reserves by then, meaning by 2027. We need to take a look at that.

As I indicated earlier, Madam President, table one is key to understanding, my view, no fancy formulas and economic jargon. Table one is key to understanding what is being proposed, and how the variables that they have set out here, from recurrent revenue to recurrent expenditure, flow into this overall balance that we are told will be contributing to the reserves. It remains a mystery to me how the overall balance will be, contributing to the reserves in relation to what follows.

I fail to see how that will occur as projected, Madam President, when the size of the civil service is increasing, massive pension payments have to be made and are being made, massive salaries are being paid, official travelling is up and at an unprecedented high level, and look at this in the document. Revenues are projected to decline over the period.

All these things militate against building revenues or even achieving a surplus over that same period. In terms of recurrent revenue and some observations I make as well, Madam President. I just indicated that revenues are forecasted to decline relative to the amount provisionally collected in 2024. It's in the document.

So, if we are doing so well, how come we are projecting less? How come you are projecting a revenue decline? Storm signal. Storm signal. That reminds me of perhaps, Madam President, you may be familiar with that work, a very seminal piece of economic development treaties by Katie McCaffrey in 1991 called "Storm Signals: Structural Adjustment", and I think it's "Development Alternatives in the Caribbean", and one of the

storm signals is indicated in the budgeting process of small-island developing states, when there is projected steady downward trend over a course of two to three years in revenue has to be a storm signal.

You could dance. You could spin it how you want with PR and so on, but it's a downward trend in revenue collection. It means that you'll be taking in less over the period, particularly in relation to expenditure over the same period.

In short, a mouth full of English, we could be looking at going into a whole, financial whole, but shortly, I will demonstrate why my friends are not too worried about the shorter, earlier part of that period projected decline in revenues.

Madam President, the CBI cash cow. I remember indicating to one of my colleagues that the feeding frenzy that we now see with the CBI is kind of reminiscent of when they had offshore banking, and was about the decline. A feeding frenzy is a surge before its decline. This too… This cash cow programme is already starting to see the beginning of its Waterloo days.

CBI has already deteriorated significantly, and, Madam President, the conduct of… You see, there is a backstory, too, you know. The conduct of OECS governments that operate this programme in trying to undercut and outcompete one another, including Grenada, has resulted in adverse consequences for all of us.

I believe if not this month, sometime very soon, the OECS authority and the ECCB are meeting, I think, here in Grenada, regarding the proposal of having a joint CIP or CBI approval system. I think these are responses to the transparency and other pressures coming from the European Union and the United States. All no doubt linked to that practice, I just mentioned.

And so, it must be appreciated that the CBI is on a decline. Applications for the programme are on the decline; this was apparent at the end of 2024 compared to 2023. It's looking bleak. In terms of the global picture, capital expenditure, I see it is expected to increase over the 2024 levels, but it is expected to trend downward very sharply, very sharply, from almost EC$500 million to just about EC$200 million by 2027. Given the obvious necessities, infrastructural needs and otherwise, why a trend downwards?

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Just now, when I made reference to McCaffrey's seminal work, there were three pillars for developing states' advancement towards a clear picture of even possibly becoming first-world nations' status, as Trinidad declared some time ago, I think 2002 to 2005 under Patrick Manning, that they were heading in that direction.

The developmental model must follow and root itself on three pillars: substantial investment in infrastructure, health care, and education. Education—that aspect of educational instruction and learning that replaced developing states within an appreciable range of technical competitiveness. All other fancy things are broken down to mean more skills training and relevant modern technical skills training, so that you can move with the times. Well, as to that pillar of infrastructural development, I think it is beyond useful an argument by anybody that there are serious infrastructural needs that must be met in this country, particularly in our road and drainage networks right now. You have to look at the way the language is sculptured, "2024", "by 2027" and "over the period". Okay?

So, why the downward projection in 2027, the sharp cliffhanging fall? What event, Madam President, is to happen between 2025 and 2026 for a sharp increase in that expenditure, and then the abrupt drop in capital expenditure by 2027? What event? What is causing that surge and then drop over the course of, essentially, what, a year? Bell ringing? I could see that there. It can only be one thing, Madam President, but why the smoke and mirrors?

The Government has no serious or original infrastructural development programme. All public works projects in tow have been negotiated for and commenced by the predecessor. Your business is to dutifully carry them out and see them to fruition expeditiously, so, too. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)**

Well, you ask for the obligation. You are not doing anybody favours. Let me tell you. You have an obligation to service to the public, you know. You are not doing anybody favours, panther. So, they have already dismantled certain legal requirements in my respectful view, Madam President, when I mentioned what was obtained before under the Fiscal Responsibility Act and now the same acronym but just a different name, Fiscal Resilience.

So certain legal requirements that were there before are gone, those that were under the Fiscal Responsibility Act, for example. I see, and I had an occasion to comment when this Bill came here before, last year, I think it was. Certain levels of projects would not be put before the public procurement process. Before, the threshold, I think, was EC$15,000 above, and it has been moved to EC$100,000; anything EC$100,000 and above, then you will go to the open public procurement process.

You see, Madam President, the low threshold that was there before, there was a reason to it, and that threshold was not indigenous to Grenada. A number of other countries had similar fiscal responsibility legislation with similar low levels. Why? Why? Because it was self-regulating in that it avoided unfairness and corruption in the distribution of certain public works projects and other construction. That is why it was so low. That is why it was so low.

Now, basically, you could hand-pick friends who will get whatever is available within the EC$15,000 to the EC$100,000 range. And I suppose very shortly there will be a surge in expenditure in that regard. That is the driving force behind this because, Madam President, none of the numbers that I see here, when I look at the trend that is unexplained, none of the numbers relate to strategic priorities stated on page 10 of the document. Smoke and mirrors.

Madam President, thank you. The strategic priorities on page 10, although stated in broad terms, are of critical importance because I began by indicating that the budget must also explain, elaborate, and articulate the government's programmes, which they intend to keep the economy buoyant and promote growth in the territorial economic space that we have in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. And so, when you look at the figures, when properly analysed and closely examined, no programs are elaborated or spelt out; that's why we are able to discern downward trends, sharp expenditure increase and then fall. We know what's going to happen, and I think it is a misfortune, a great misfortune, that these things have not been explained as to how they relate to the strategic objectives.

Now, in terms of the financial outlook, looking from abroad, I see in another place

the situation of beginning and planning the budget from the position of a current account surplus as being cheerfully commendable. Well, Madam President, you're supposed to start from a current account surplus. You're supposed to start from our current account surplus.

So, yes, it's commendable that you're doing the right thing. You are starting at the right place, but it is important to note, Madam President, before we start ringing bells and whistling over very fundamental things, that the unsuspecting public might, when they listen to the gallery, think it is some great achievement. It's important to appreciate what is there. If you're starting from that position, you're starting from a position where your current revenue is bigger than your expected expenditure. That's good. You have to start there.

Now, usually with those surpluses, you'll have room to pay or maybe contribute something to capital expenditure or pay something on a loan, and though it's a good starting point, you need to have something more. You are nowhere close to achieving real growth merely by starting where you are supposed to. You will have to go a little further. You need more. You need to do more because if you can only pay a little something from the surplus, pay a little something on a debt, how is the economy to grow? If you can only do that, you can do nothing else. You can spend on any kind of capital expenditure in any serious way, so there we are dropping real employment, no serious growth and no serious new jobs. That is the kind of discussion and explanation we were looking forward to. That's what we want to hear

So while beginning from a current account surplus is good, you must still get something more because, you see, Madame President, they know all too well, especially in this dispensation, and I'll shortly talk about the new era and foreign relations we are entering into, especially hemispherically. We have to be careful, policies have to be thoughtful and premised on principle.

But in relation to the subject matter, we know that grants are hard to come by now. We aren't getting grants easily. When you're getting a grant for specific purposes, you have to use it quickly, you have to use it wisely. So, if we are not living within our means,

if we are doing "hototo" expenditure on dazzle events with no real substance and no real job creation potential, we'll find ourselves facing the whole that I indicated that these numbers suggest to us, where we will be, in short order, looking to contract other government commercial loans and where we want to sell bonds. Storm signal. It's coming.

And so when I surveyed the legislative agenda and relation to the lead up to these things, I see beginning from the fiscal resilience coming straight down to appropriation borrowing last year, leading into this belated budget.

On the matter of our foreign affairs, Madam President, I think it is of critical importance that we recognise that we are in a new era of the global and hemispheric application of United States foreign policy. Our foreign policy, in this new era of US relations, certainly in the conduct of external affairs, even our economic initiatives that hinge on our external relations, these things must be carefully dealt with and scrupulously carried out.

I recommend that they must first be premised on principle, not necessarily economic vagrancy; you gone to get a thing here, and you beg to get a thing here. We have already begun to see that there is becoming a hostile environment, particularly for some of our closest friends with whom we have had long fraternal and diplomatic ties. We must appreciate this new environment that we're in and be careful what we are saying. It's not a laughing matter. We are not in the 70s and 80s anymore, and the new global space, that economic environment that has been shaped by the twin forces of globalisation and trade liberalisation, will cause, very easily, adverse economic effects to visit us very quickly and for a sustained period if we are not skilful in our external relations. I don't need to say more.

Madam President, my distinguished friend, Doctor Charles wanted to make sure that I do not forget that when my friends opposite come with their paper and their numbers about periods of increase and decline in the unemployment rates and about periods of drop and increase in enrolment at the TAMCC, we must be mindful that on both fronts the discussion on the economic impact and on the unemployment rate and the enrolment

rates at the TAMCC. What is was, Brother Cox? The context? The context is important, but you can't have your own context or have a context convenient to you.

So when you bring the numbers and you see the period where there is the drop, and you realise that it is the COVID-19 period that affected the unemployment and also affected enrolment rates, you didn't mention that. That context is not important. The context that is important is after 2022, to make it appear as if there was a magical increase in these numbers of enrolment and a magical decrease in unemployment because of you, you came and you worked your magic.

You can't have your own context, man. What was? **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Context what? Context is what, key? But that key can't fit all doors. The key can only fit your door. No magic has been done, and we expect no magic will be done, especially from the smoke and mirrors we see here. What I expect to see, Madam President, particularly in my brief analysis of the capital expenditure, because I know our people, you know, to create that impression, boy, them fellas start to work, see things happening, look how many drains they built, they start to work, boy. What is the period? What's the period, Brother Cox? 2025… Sharp increase over 2025 and 2026, pay attention. Pay attention.

But before I leave my caution in relation to how, in this fiscal cycle, and in relation to Government's conduct of external relations, I think we must recognise, all of us, the critical role that our Cuban friends have played in our health system over the years **(applause)** and when I say over the years, for decades and right now you see brewing with some others, we are not quite drawn into that yet and that is why I said what I said just now about prudence with what we say with our mouths because it is not about ego and it is not about getting prime time for attention to get into an international debate with North America. It is about prudence because you are representing people; people's lives depend on it.

This visa thing that's brewing there, we don't need to be in that. We don't need to be in that. However, we must never abandon our friends and abandon principle. We must understand the nature of our sovereignty and also its limits. In the policy of human

conduct and the history of man, sovereignty is not absolute. It is only absolute when one can enforce it, so until in some kind of normative concept for academics and people sit down and draft instruments with the UN and advise, and so on, it's nice to talk about, but this is a practical thing. And in the business between nations, it is a practical endeavour; diplomacy is practical, but good diplomacy must rest on principle. Principle.

And I pay tribute to that friendship we've had with the People and Government of Cuba and the support we've had over several decades, but at the same time, I want to recognise and remind us that we have had for even that same period or a greater period than that period, substantial people-to-people connections with North America. Every family, I'm sure, without fail, can identify some branch of the family or some family member living in Canada, and more so, living in the United States.

We must remember where we are. We are in the Western Hemisphere and the sphere of influence of certain countries, and we must be sensitive to that and fashion strategically our relations so that we will navigate these waters and not just go and say what we want outside there.

I think the short point I'm making, Madam President, is that the consequences are not personal to people who represent us that say certain things, the consequences that visit us in time, social and economic, are upon our people, and so a word to the wise, be very careful what you're saying there. Very, very careful.

Madam President, I recognise that there are some challenges and they are not new challenges, so I'm not going to say that they just arrived with our friends opposite, who are new to Government, they have just got into office barely three years and change now, if all of that; although from their behaviour you will think they've been there forever.
(Inaudible comment by a Senator)

But there are some critical challenges on the national security front; we need to be mindful, Madam President, about our porous borders and to cast a more discerning eye on immigration policy. Now, we have a neighbour, a very close neighbour to the south, that is reeling with the influx of some people, almost coming in like Exodus in the Bible and Bob Marley song, from another country, and we know that from historical experience

these things bring almost immediate socioeconomic difficulties and pressures on the health system, the security system, particularly.

In the context of our small state, it will be wise, as some have now recognised they have to progress to that to ensure that we have a legislative framework by which we can marshal all security resources and make collective decisions regarding security. Some countries have done through a National Security Act where you establish a National Security Council that does a collaboration and an input into the council from all key national security stakeholders whether it be Customs, Immigration, the Police, Special Branch of the Police, Tactical Units and Drug Squad and so on, rather than just one central burden on the police themselves because there are other branches that play a critical role in national security, particularly, what I am mentioning here as boarder security.

And why is this important? It is not far-fetched, particularly what is happening with a certain neighbour to the south, and some will see to some degree here it is starting to happen. We got an influx of people, and we already have difficulties managing violence with certain sectors, whether it be gangs, certain juvenile demographics that have access to firearms and so on. These are already real challenges. Imagine the burden that could be placed upon us by the influx of some other people, particularly where we already know from past experience in other places, the very real threat, or very complex and organised criminal activity that could present. We can't be asleep on this at all.

This is not a sexy topic. It is not something that we like to talk about when there is a budget cycle for radio programmes, but it is a real threat to national security and our management of border security and by extension, our national security. And so greater emphasis must now be turned in that direction. It is critical, and I hope that some of our neighbours in the OECS are doing so. We can move towards setting up that superstructure by which we can marshal the resources that we have and even organise to get some more to tackle having strong border security in these islands that are easily accessible.

Madam President, I'm always troubled, even to the point of dismay, when I hear

about young people taking their lives. I do appreciate the challenges that my friend opposite, who is charged with the policy direction of the Ministry of Education, has upon him and upon those who effectively discharge his responsibility in the system, because, you know, people really think ministers run everything. You bring the policy to the ministry and direct that it be implemented—civil servants carry the load.

But, it is always very painful, Madam President, very, very painful, and I don't think it is an administration to blame. No administration is to blame for that, and I want my friends to appreciate clearly where I'm going with that. There are certain social conditions, economic, too, but largely social conditions, which are developing in our communities, particularly at this time, with this larger youth population unmentored, unsupervised and lastly produced by very young people themselves. The sociological tensions that are occurring, some find it very difficult to cope, and the real challenge for the education system is that…

You know, it is often said, my friend, the minister would know that, I can't remember which sociologist characterised it. It's that the school system is another family or another representation of family. The burden of teachers is not just to give instructions on a blackboard. You have to now listen. You have to now be attentive to the distressed conditions of students in your classroom so that you can respond either by enlisting counselling or directing them to where they are to be. That too becomes a pressure on teachers, and so there is a real need to examine more closely this sociological phenomenon, my friend, these tensions that are occurring.

We will not be doing service to our people if every time we hear about these occurrences, unfortunate, sad and depressing as they may be, we just say what a pity and then move on till we hear another occurrence. We must appreciate what is happening sociologically and try our best to make these interventions, Madam President. That is the best we can do. We're not saying that we are perfect and we will solve them, but our young people urgently need that kind of intervention.

And so this is why, Madam President, there is such a large investment in social welfare and social welfare programmes in some countries. I know we have our

challenges, but as my distinguished sister said, "Perhaps after a global look, we determine what our priorities must be", and there's a pressing and urgent need for us to examine that. Pressing. It is not enough for us to just hear it happen, get sad and carry on. We need to do the best we can, and we need to do the most we can, because we are here to do the greatest good, Madam President, in the greatest number.

I thank you. And so with these remarks, Madam President, I join with my colleagues who went before me in our analysis of this belated budget given to us by a reluctant Minister of Finance.

Madam President, I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity and also your kind indulgences, before, in understanding my personal situation in relation to Tuesday's Sitting in this Chamber. I thank you very much, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President: I thank you, Senator Horsford. Thank you for your overview flight, stopping at particular key points, key proposals in the budget. I want to thank you for making reference to the regional academic text, Storm Signals. Still relevant. It's worth a read, again. Thank you.

I see that Senator Claudette Joseph has asked for the floor, and she is being given the floor. She is on her feet, and so the floor does belong to Senator Claudette Joseph. Thank you.

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, let me begin my contribution to this year's Budget Presentation by first acknowledging the awesome supremacy of the Almighty and the blessings he continues to pour on us and on me.

I acknowledge my colleagues of this Honourable House on both sides, but especially my colleagues on "This Side" with whom I have the pleasure of working as colleagues in the Cabinet serving the people of our beautiful country.

I also extend thanks to our beloved, totally committed, and visionary leader, the Honourable Dickon Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada, for continuing to repose

confidence in me as Attorney General and minister.

I thank Members and supporters of the National Democratic Congress, and I see some in the gallery today. I acknowledge you. The vehicle through which we are here today, serving the people of Grenada in Government. I thank you for your continued support and for all your efforts as we work collectively to move Grenada forward, towards Vision 75, ever resilient, and always rising. **(Applause)**

I stand to give my unreserved support to the Motion before this Honourable House for approval of the 2025 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. Same was presented in the House of Representatives and totalling EC$1,912,872,014. Of that, Madam President, the ministry that I head, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Affairs, is allocated a total of EC$11,949,386, which does not include the departments of the Director of Public Prosecution, the Supreme Court Registry, nor does it include the Magistracy.

Madam President, let me just pause for a moment before I get into the matters directly relating to the ministry which I head to just address a few other matters that have come up in this debate today. Madam President, let me first make the point that the last speaker identified in this presentation three important pillars for growth and those pillars he identified include investment in infrastructure, healthcare and education.

We agree with him on "This Side" and I'm surprised that he didn't follow up that observation with a statement commending this Government for being on the right track **(applause)** because we have, as Government, identified as transformational pillars; healthcare hence Project Polaris **(applause)** and the allocation in the Ministry of Infrastructure, under the Ministry of Infrastructure, the capital budget there for Project Polaris, which squarely focuses on healthcare in that we aim to construct a state-of-the-art health and wellness village that will include not just a teaching hospital that will promote medical tourism, but other facilities including a wellness centre, a hotel and some major infrastructure around the 83-plus acres of land that we have acquired for that purpose. **(Applause)**

So wrapped up in Project Polaris are two of the pillars identified by the Opposition Senator as essential to national development. Infrastructure, because it will be a major piece of infrastructure, the biggest after our International Airport, and it will take this Government to undertake a major piece of infrastructure that would be transformative 40 years after our International Airport was constructed.

The impact of Project Polaris will be the same as SGU has on the True Blue and southern area, and that vision was of Sir Eric Gairy as the International Airport had on the southern area; that vision was that of Maurice Bishop and his Government, and now we would have Project Polaris. Show me the visionary, transformative project of the person and Government that held office for 23 years in this country. Show me. Can't identify one.

Education, Madam President, we have also identified as a pillar of growth and transformation. And in that regard, we are not only going to substantially enhance and revamp the current system as we know it, but we are going to build a whole new wing of our education system centred around skills training, so that our young people can be qualified to international standards in skills training. I thought I would want to clear that up.

Madam President, that was some talk about the Fiscal Resilience Act and whether we did away with key elements of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, and an admonition that the amendment to the Procurement Act to increase the threshold for procuring entities was ill-advised and not in our best interests.

Madam President, the Public Procurement and Disposal Property Act came into effect in 2014. At that time, the threshold was set at EC$15,000.00. We had obviously, we had an administration between then and 2022 that was sleeping on the job because we had an increase in prices, and we had COVID-19 that caused goods and services prices to skyrocket, but the threshold remained at EC$15,000.

Basically, nothing could be done, Madam President, nothing could be done quickly and efficiently, and that is why we inherited a terribly crumbling infrastructure. Because when an emergency happens, flash flooding, whatever, or a bridge collapse, or a roadway

needs attention, the bureaucracy prevents swift action because you can't even build a driveway to your house from the main road these days for EC$15,000, but here you had a Government threshold of EC$15,000. So we were responding to the needs, the infrastructural and other needs of our country and moving with the times, bearing in mind the astronomical increase in goods and services over time from 2014 to now. They had to have been sleeping on the job to not realise that this legislation needed amending a long time ago. **(Applause)**

And, Madam President, might I just say that we will not continence being judged by the same standards as those who went before us because we don't engage in bobol and corruption. In fact, we believe in corruption savings, and that is reflected in the budget, as my friend this morning pointed out.

Madam President, speaking of infrastructure and… Let me… Yes, Madam President, speaking of infrastructure and addressing the crumbling infrastructure that we inherited, I would just like to here, Madam President, place on record on behalf of the people of my community, the Town of St. George, in which I am, you could say the face of the Government, our sincere thanks to the Ministry of Social and Community Development, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and the Ministry of Mobilisation, Implementation and Transformation.

Madam President, during the course of 2024, several projects, small infrastructure projects, community-based projects, cultural projects, sporting facility upgrades, all of these things were undertaken with the support of the Ministry of Infrastructure from building a retaining wall at Mt. Rush, three small projects at Independence Avenue, footpath for the elderly at Cooper Hill, and a concrete walkway at Darbeau, a bus shelter at Darbeau. Madam President, all of these small projects, these are just a few I mentioned, came up to EC$120,215.57 out of the Ministry of Social and Community Development.

Then we had community facilities upgrades. We had the painting of the Alliance Française Building and minor repairs to the River Road Community Centre. We had some work done at the Roy St. John Playing Field towards dealing with the flooding

situation at Tanteen. You know, Tanteen is pretty much a lake when it rains, and the efforts we made there see the water receding faster when it rains.

Madam President, we also did some skills training and some training in hydroponics, courses in hydroponics, community clean-up after the flash floods and several other community engagements, which together totalled EC$243,803.12. All thanks to the Ministry of Community Development. **(Applause)**

Madam President, in terms of the House Repair Programme. We had, in terms of repairs, 30 families whose homes were repaired under that programme. We had eight new constructions and 14 bathrooms and toilets, Madam President, totalling EC$424,016.85, and I would like to heartily thank the Ministry of Social and Community Development for contributing to the constituency of St. George a total sum of EC$667,820.07 in 2024.

Madam President, for 2025, we look forward to continuing to build our community, and I dare say, the community of the Town of St. George, which was seriously neglected for the last 20 or so years. A lot of work to be done, and so we are going to construct a few retaining walls in this year, one is already started at Grenville Street, repairs to the sidewalks in and around the town including the sidewalk on the Carenage, we've started some of the sidewalks repairs, turning stony and muddy footpaths into walkways and motorable roads, making life more comfortable for our people.

Upgrading facilities, Madam President. We have started the upgrade of the sporting facility at Queen's Park. We've done the basketball and netball courts, and we are now doing some work on the football field, including lighting it and building some bleachers and meeting rooms for the football clubs there. So, Madam President, we have a lot to do, and I must say, some of the work that we are doing in the constituency there, some of this work is in collaboration with some community groups, so the people are engaging in self-help. One such community group is the River Road Legacy Foundation, with which we are partnering to do a community library and resource centre at the community centre at River Road.

So, Madam President, I look forward to continuing to be the face of the

Government in that constituency and to working with all the people of the constituency as we improve our collective lives. Thank you to the constituents that has been very supportive in ensuring that this work is done for our community.

Madam President, as I indicated, the allocation for the ministry… I would turn now to the ministry, the Ministry of Social and Community Development… Sorry. **(Laughter)** Social and Community Development is still in my head. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** You see, that's my heart. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Yes, that's my heart.

So yes, Madam President, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Affairs. In terms of accomplishments for 2024, Madam President, the accomplishments which we have seen at this ministry underscore our commitment to justice, the rule of law, labour rights, labour justice, consumer protection and sustainable lifestyles.

Madam President, in 2024, the Office of the Attorney General and the Division of Legal Affairs continued to provide critical legal support and advice to the Government of Grenada in various areas. One highlight of this past year for the Litigation Unit... Madam President, just for the benefit of the viewers, listeners and the persons here in the gallery, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is comprised of mainly two units: the Litigation Unit and the Drafting Unit.

So the Litigation Unit had, as I would say, our main highlight in 2024, our appearance before the International Court of Justice as it heard submissions from over 100 countries and organisations in relation to an advisory opinion that was sought of the court on the obligation of states in relation to Climate Change. Madam President, since the establishment of the court in 1945, this was the first time Grenada ever made an appearance before the court, and it was indeed, for me, a humbling experience and a great honour to lead our country's delegation in this historic undertaking. **(Applause)**

Madam President, I thank Crown Counsel, Ms. Rae Thomas and Doctor Justin Sobian, who joined me in forming Grenada's team and, of course, Ambassador Raphael Joseph, who provided stellar support. Ambassador is based in Brussels, and without him, we would not have done this, so I thank the entire team. From all reports, everywhere,

we represented Grenada well. **(Applause)** I think it was the first time I made international news.

Madam President, the Court Advisory Opinion is expected in the coming months. Madam President, our Government is one that is attuned to the issues and realities of the day, and we identified climate change as an existential threat to our very existence as a small island developing state. And so, again, in relation to climate change, we had, from the Office of the Attorney General, representation at the first China Legal Forum on Legal Cooperation in Climate Change, and this is under the global development initiative, and the office was represented in this regard by Crown Counsel Regine Mondesir.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Climate Resilience and her staff for the collaboration and cooperation with us in making representations on climate change in these matters. In fact, it was the Minister for Climate Change who alerted me to the existence of the case and encouraged Grenada, through the Office of the Attorney General, to file submissions and arguments and become a party to the proceedings.

Madam President, the Litigation Unit also successfully represented the State of Grenada in several matters: in the courts, before tribunals, and at mediation sessions. And I would here pause to make note of a matter that the state prevailed in, and that is the matter of Royden Beharry versus the Attorney General of Grenada. **(Applause)**

It is important, Madam President, because as we proceed with our regularisation policy, this case clarified the legal status of persons employed in the public sector without a Public Service Commission Appointment, but may be working in positions that are on the establishment or in a post that is on the establishment, and this clarification is indeed important as Government proceeds the implement the regularisation policy and gives a good guide to parties, both sides, Government and workers as to their status. So it was timely that this matter came out, and we were able to get the court to clarify it and to see it the way the Government sees it.

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Claudette Joseph

I would like to commend the Solicitor General and particularly Ms. Camille Gooding DeSouza, who led the arguments on behalf of the Crown in this matter.

Madam President, the other important unit in the Office of the Attorney General and Division of Legal Affairs is the Legislative Drafting Unit, and they spearheaded the enactment of key pieces of legislation during 2024. Chief among them was the Public Sector Employees Fund Act. They worked hard to draft and finalise this legislation after receiving the policy direction from the Department of Public Administration. I dare say, Madam President, this legislation is the single most transformative law passed in Grenada since the NIS Act of 1983. **(Applause)**

Madam President, all public sector employees, now, no matter when their employment began, enjoy pension and retirement benefits. **(Applause)** This hasn't been the case for 40 years. Madam President, despite the people of Grenada, they can see, they have the right lenses **(laughter) (applause)** and they can see what is happening. So no matter how things are spun, no matter how issues are spun, no matter what the Opposition says, the facts are the facts and is that. **(Applause)**

Public workers pension rights were taken away from them, and kept away from them deliberately so. They were fought on the streets and in the courts by their own Government, and their own Government admitted that after they lost the case to the public workers, they only did not appeal because the election was eminent. And if they had won, they would have still tried to appeal out of time. That's what one of their chief advisors said in an opinion that was shared with me as Attorney General. So, Madam President, the public workers and the people of Grenada have on the correct lenses and they are seeing clearly now who are on their side.

Madam President, a bit of key legislations worked on by the Drafting Unit during this period is the Firearms (Amendment) Act. Opposition Senator Horsford in his presentation admonished us to pay close attention to what is happening around us in terms of serious crimes. That is exactly what we are doing, Madam President **(applause)**, and that is why we have amended the Firearms Act, and shamefully while we were being admonished and encouraged to pay attention about what is going on

around us in terms of crime and do something about it, when we came in this Honourable House or in the "Other Place", Madam President, they more well behaved up here. In the "Other Place", when these amendments were put on the Order Paper for debate and passage, those who did not vote against it, abstained. Shameful. **(Applause)** So I imagine the good Senator is speaking in his personal capacity when he talked about the situation with crime and the fact that we must do something about it.

Madam President, and recently the Drafting Unit was able to have us prepare and pass in this Honourable House, the Water Resources Management Act and the attendant amendment to the NAWASA Act, that too, Madam President, is pivotal as we regulate the water industry. NAWASA is now regulated by PURC, by that legislation, and we rolled out and tried to complete against the plot, Madam President, a project that we inherited from the previous administration, who again slept on the job, and we almost lost millions of dollars. That project, I think it was EC$125 million. We were at risk of losing millions of dollars, and we are racing against the clock, Madam President, because they sat there from 2018 to 2022 and did nothing with the project. So, Madam President, and that is part of the Water Resource Management Act that we recently passed.

Madam President, all of this work was done as the Division of Legal Affairs remained displaced and mostly working remotely. I am happy to share with this Honourable House and the nation that as of Monday of this week, the Office of the Attorney General was moved into new office space on the first floor of the old NIS Building on **(applause)** Melville Street. Madam President, the new office is outfitted with all the amenities, including a conference room and a vault, which is a first for any office of the Attorney General in Grenada, believe it or not.

I knew the old Attorney General's Office on Church Street before Hurricane Ivan, and that had been there since the 1800s. After Hurricane Ivan, because of the damage to the building, they moved out and then to a different location. The AG's Office has never had the amenities that this new space now enjoys. **(Applause)**

And, Madam President, I would like to thank the Minister for Infrastructure, the Prime Minister, the Chief Technical Officer, the Ministry of Infrastructure and the staff.

Particularly, I would have to single him out. He may not like it, but I would have to do it, Mr. Nathan Lessey, a young engineer there. **(Applause)** He really, really worked with us to make this possible.

And I single out, in terms of our staff, apart from the staff, the lawyers and the support staff who had a hard time. It is two years, or it is over two years? We crossed two years? They had a hard time, but I would like to single out our Planning Officer in the ministry, Ms. Brenda Bain. I see her up there. I don't know if it's proper to ask her to take a bow, Madam President, in the Honourable House. Take a bow, Brenda, and Permanent Secretary behind me here, Ms. Rhonda Jones, and Permanent Secretary passed, Ms...

Madam President: Stand up. I want to know you, and I am sure the people want to know you.

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: You see, the President is asking you to stand, Brenda. Thank you very much. **(Applause)**

Madam President, a lot of hard work went into it, and all of the staff at the ministry chipped in to make sure we move into this new facility. So, going forward, I am looking forward to us becoming even more efficient as we deliver services to the Government and people of Grenada.

Madam President, just finally on the Division of Legal Affairs, an update on the Hall of Justice Project. Madam President, you would see that on page 194 of the Estimates, there is an allocation of EC$2 million for the Hall of Justice Project, the same amount that was allocated last year. Of the amount that was allocated last year, EC$2 million, we spent EC$1.6 million. Madam President, I am sure we would exhaust the EC$2 million this year and probably we would have to come for some more because the work is progressing. A lot of preparatory work is being done.

With those projects, a lot has to happen behind the scenes. There were some legacy issues which we have resolved. We are now with a project consultant who has come on board to finalise the work plans. We do have the work plans and the design brief,

and we hope to send out invitations. In relation to this, we hope to send out invitations to bid for design concepts and the engagement of a project manager. So the Hall of Justice Project is moving, and that, Madam President, is another infrastructure project that we will deliver to the people of Grenada and a symbol and have it as a symbol of the third coequal independent arm of the state. **(Applause)**

Madam President, in relation to Labour, I could tell you, but I don't know what the good Senator would say, but I am sure he is the happiest and most relaxed than he has been in years as a union leader. Because, Madam President, the Division of Labour has in 2024 delivered and implemented an increased minimum wage for all workers. **(Applause)**

Madam President, again, in relation to this, the Opposition, the previous administration, they were sleeping on the job because they never in their 23-year reign, all how they talking about they love the poor and the vulnerable and the marginalise, never once in their 24-year reign increased the minimum wage when the law says they must do it every three years. **(Applause)** So, I am urging our people to compare and contrast and then determine who is really good for Grenada and is working for the people.

Madam President, we also focused heavily on capacity building and institutional strengthening by taking on some more technical staff to support the work of the Labour Commissioner. Madam President, in this period, we also had our historic first visit to the Department of Labour, the first visit by the Director of the [8]ILO decent work team for the Caribbean. In fact, he joined us for the May Day celebrations and delivered some remarks, which had never happened before.

This mission also pledged and has started working with us to deliver improved occupational safety and health. Well, perhaps, not just improve, we don't have occupational health and safety legislation, so this is something we have on our legislative agenda for this year and a Public Employment Services Act, not an Act, but public employment services are already provided for in a sense under the Employment Act, but

[8] International Labour Organisation

again, as with many things, never implemented, international labour standards reporting and labour market information and labour inspections. All of these we intend to undertake in 2025, with the help of our friends from the ILO.

Madam President, for the first time since 1998... How many years is that? 25 or 26 years this year? For the first time since 1998, we had a delegation from Grenada attend the International Labour Conference, and that delegation **(applause)** represented Government, the employers, the unions and the employees, the tripartite arrangement, and that was at the expense of the Government of Grenada. That's how important our workers are to us.

Madam President, again sleeping on the job, we were on the blacklist and in the red, not looking well at all for reporting because our last report in accordance with our obligations under the ILO Treaty was 2015, and so we were behind with 18 outstanding reports required by article 22 of the ILO Treaty and our team, led by the Commissioner, was able to bring Grenada up to standard, so that now we are in good standing. If you go to the ILO's website, we are not on the bad side.

Madam President, we also did a rapid label market analysis that is towards helping us to set up the employment services that I mentioned before. Madam President, the Division of Labour has also substantially settled the amendments to the policy that will guide the amendments to the labour code, and these amendments, Madam President, will see an extension of maternity leave benefits for all new mothers, that's a table knock right there **(applause)**, extension of maternity benefits, and the introduction of paternity leave. This, Madam President, our fathers will now have paternity leave just as the mothers have maternity. **(Applause)**

Madam President... **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Grenada... No, not retroactive. **(Laughter)** Grenada, Madam President, will be the first English-speaking Caribbean and only the second in the entire Caribbean to legislate paternity leave. **(Applause)** The only other Caribbean country that has paternity leave on the law books right now is the Dominican Republic. So when I say in the entire Caribbean, I mean English, Spanish, French and Dutch. Only the second country to have it done. We

look forward to this because we know our people and workers will greatly appreciate the introduction of paternity leave and the extension of maternity leave.

The new or revised labour code, Madam President, will also see the introduction of a new dispute resolution mechanism, and so we are advancing the drafting of the legislation, and we hope to have that legislation passed in the Parliament during the second quarter.

Madam President, as we improved the dispute resolution mechanism at the Ministry of Labour, the division is actually doing quite well with the system that we have. They have achieved a resolution rate of 85% of all complaints lodged with the department. The Division also processed 918 work permits in 2024, totalling in value, in terms of revenue for the country, EC$2,078,000.

Madam President, we also had 45 seasonal agricultural workers participating in the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme. Madam President, Grenada is now experiencing the best, the best period of industrial peace ever. **(Applause)** Check the history. Madam President, we have a high level of employment, and the Minister for Education gave the figures this morning. We are at 11%. I think that the best after that was during the Revolution, it got to like 14% or something like that. So we are doing... Imagine we are outdoing Maurice Bishop, how's that? **(Applause)**

Madam President, we have a high level of employment. A very satisfied workforce who are enjoying their increased minimum wage, and groundbreaking, favourable collective agreements with unions and the word groundbreaking is not mine, I'm just borrowing it from the former president of the Public Workers Union, Mr. Brian Grimes. Madam President, we have better working conditions with most government offices now upgraded or undergoing upgrades, and, Madam President, thankfully, the days for worker victimisation are a thing of the past. **(Applause)**

Imagine we moved from Gemma Bain-Thomas and Richard Duncan. Richard Duncan, who was told, "Well, I don't think you trust me, and once there is no trust, nothing happens". Read his book 'Walking the Straight and Narrow', and Gemma Bain-Thomas called to Happy Hill and said, "I have a feeling you don't support me, so you're out". We

move from that, Madam President, to the Prime Minister having to stand in the other place and threaten to sue for his constituency allowance, because some public officer refusing to pay him, and they still have their job. **(Applause)** That's freedom.

So when they're talking victimisation, we give these live examples, so I know Madam President, we know that our workers in the public and private sector, we heard the private sector representative gave his contribution, they could not be happier, this is a good period for workers, Madam President.

Madam President, and so with that, I would like to place on record my thanks and appreciation to the Labour Commissioner, again, the Permanent Secretary and all the staff, all the support staff at the Division of Labour. The Labour Commissioner works very hard, and she gets the job done. **(Applause)** Thank you. They say take a bow. **(Laughter)**

Madam President, in relation to consumer affairs. I want to put consumer affairs into context, Madam President. The Consumer Protection Act was passed in 2018, and that was it. Basically, nothing was done. So, Madam President, this Government, because the previous one was sleeping on the job, established the Consumer Affairs Office on March 15, 2024, and as I said, this law was passed in 2018, and section 6 required the establishment of a Consumer Affairs Office, but it was not until 2024 that it was done. And, Madam President, in just one year, the office led by Director Williams has made significant strides in educating the public not just on the existence of the office itself, but on their rights. They've engaged stakeholders, they have had campaigns, and they have a workshop to raise awareness.

And Madam President, last Friday, on the 14th of March, Grenada celebrated its first World Consumer Rights Day. **(Applause)** The International Body for Consumer Rights has been in existence for about 60 years and is celebrating this day, but because our Act was not implemented, we only just celebrated our first World Consumer Rights Day, and we look forward to celebrating many more.

And we thank the other Government ministries, the Ministry of Education, the

Ministry of Agriculture, the Public Utility Regulations Commission, the [9]NTRC, the Ministry of Health, all of these ministries and statutory bodies joined with the Consumer Affairs Office in celebrating the day and educating the public and, of course, there was a private sponsor, Digicel with some great giveaways.

Madam President, the Consumer Advisory Body, required by the law, was also established, and it is headed by Doctor Curlan Gilchrist. We look forward to receiving much-needed policy advice and guidance from that advisory body, and also, Madam President, soon the tribunal required by the statute will be set up. We hope to have that set up before the third quarter of this year.

Madam President, but even as the tribunal itself is not set up yet, the office has begun hearing complaints and taking matters to resolution, and so they have received in the first nine months of operation, about just over 100 complaints and have completely resolved about 60% of those. Madam President, so we look forward, in 2025, to expanding the capacity of the Consumer Affairs Office, filling it out with staffing for the competition side, and ramping up the public advocacy and education work of the Consumer Affairs Office.

Madam President, also falling under the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Affairs, is the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office. Madam President, one of the major achievements of that office in this past year was that we signed an agreement in January 2024 with the World Intellectual Property Organisation, which gave Grenada access to the Industrial Property Administration System called IPASS, and it was deployed at CAIPO in 2024.

What IPASS does is that it supports, it's a software that supports the processing and application of IP rights by establishing an e-registry, controlling workflow, processes and business rules. So, CAIPO will use IPASS to provide online services to local and international clients **(applause)**, and it is in the advanced stage of implementation now; all the work is done, and the trademarks that were registered from 2008 to present are already loaded on the IPASS system.

[9] National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission

So, what the IPASS System will also enable us to do is sign on to the Madrid Protocol, which would allow Grenada, now that we're on the system, to receive international registration of trademarks. So we're in the process of doing the necessary to sign on today, the Madrid Protocol, and that will see a dramatic increase in revenues for Grenada coming out of CAIPO.

Madam President, so these are, in a nutshell, the matters in relation to the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Affairs. We look forward to 2025 to continuing to serve the Grenadian public, the Government, and the public through the Government, and we will focus, in the Ministry of Legal Affairs, on strengthening our capacity and human resources through recruitment. In fact, we have a new... Yes, he's up there. We just recruited a young lawyer who would be assigned to the Financial Intelligence Unit and the [10]AML Commission, so that we are on top of things. We have a Senior Crown Counsel coming on shortly, and we have already recruited just to start, and we are building out the office so that we can provide more efficient services and advice to the Government of Grenada. So, we are going places, Madam President. Our goal is to enhance the competence of the legal practitioners and other staff who serve the ministry.

In Labour, Madam President, we will be working on and coming to the Parliament with some amendments to the Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens Employment Act, that's the law under which work permits are issued. So we do have the draft policy for the revamp of that legislation, and all the subsidiary legislation surrounding it. And so we would be looking to enhance our delivery of the processing of work permits, including Madam President, going digital, going online with it. It was a plan that we had since last year, but we were not able to deliver as quickly as we thought we would. However, I can say it will happen this year based on where we are with the work. Madam President, as I said, we would encourage education, empowerment, and knowledge of rights and responsibilities in relation to consumer affairs.

So, Madam President, with all of that said, I will just like, Madam President, to take

[10] Anti-Money Laundering

the next few minutes to zero back on a matter relating to the Town of St. George. I know Minister for Education mentioned that the Public Library and people always ask for the public library because, I did campaign heavily on the restoration of our Public Library, and that matter, Madam President, is actively being attended to, and is now part of a wider vision that we do have for the Town of St. George involving the refurbishment of York House.

And, by the way, for those who are saying we must do the houses now and that Hurricane Ivan, not Ivan, Hurricane Beryl was nine months ago, and we haven't built back. Well, Hurricane Ivan damaged or destroyed York House, the former Parliament Building, a heritage building and nothing was done. So you're asking us to do, in two and a half years, what you couldn't do in 21. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** Well, 23, right? **(Inaudible comment by Senators)** You're asking us to do, not, sorry, not two and a half, nine months. Well, speaking about the wider housing issues that you know they talk about a lot. Right?

And by the way, we have the library that is coming on stream as part of a wider project. Madam President, we are in the process of finalising the purchase of the Priory Building, that heritage building on Church Street, sandwiched between the Hindsey School and the Anglican Church, that certain Opposition surrogates were accusing Special Envoy Romain of buying in his personal capacity. No, he's not buying it in his personal capacity. I can tell you from first-hand. I am dealing with the transaction, which is coming through the Office of the Attorney General, and we are not his lawyers. **(Applause)**

So, Madam President, the Government of Grenada, through the Ministry of Tourism, headed by Leader of Government's Business is here, we purchasing that property and it will be a National Art Gallery, as we continue to focus on the creative sector and of course it's a wider feature involving the York House, the art gallery, the museum, the library building, all part of a project to enhance and make good use of our built heritage in the Town of St. George and to live up to our name as one of the quaintest and best Georgian-style towns in the world. This is what we have, and this is what those

before us allowed to disintegrate and crumble. So this is part of the infrastructure that we are building.

So, yes, the Public Library will come. I can't say that it will be replaced in its original location as we first said, because as we build out the project and review the best location for the different sites, the Public Library may not be relocated to its original site. But it is part of the grand plan for that constituency. Then we will have, rounding that off, the refurbished Fort George, which was... Funding for which was identified since 2017, but those who were again, sleeping on the job or perhaps too timid or lacking vision, they had the wrong lenses, they felt it was not a project that could be undertaken because of the level of the restoration of the work that have to take place, and build it back as it was built in the 1700s. Well...

Madam President: Madam Senator, before the bell rings, I see you're rapidly wrapping up, but you're also rapidly running out of time, so...

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: I am wrapping up.

Madam President: You are wrapping up?

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Yes.

Madam President: Well, you forfeited my offer of a few more minutes, so wrap up.

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Okay. **(Laughter)** I am wrapping up. If I need a few more minutes, I will do ask. So...

Madam President: Five?

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Sure, good enough. So, Madam President, all of these restorations of heritage sites, Fort George, that those before us felt wasn't possible, they thought it was too big for them, but we don't think small. We think big, and nothing is impossible, as far as we are concerned. **(Applause)** Right? We are little children of God. We are little inexperienced children of God, and for us, nothing is impossible. So, we are now seeing that this project is nearing completion. We hope to have completion by June. Is it June? By mid-year, we should have completion by mid-year, Madam President, and of course, that will be a massive enhancement for the Town of Saint George, and we, the people of the town, really look forward to the completion of that project.

We are equally proud and pleased with the facelift that Carenage has gotten, with the new Police Headquarters. **(Applause)** Madam President, I recall listening to an interview sometime in May 2013 between Pastor Stanford Simon and then Prime Minister Doctor Keith Claudius Mitchell, who was elected just a few months before, and in that interview, he promised Pastor Simon a new police headquarters, because he said that was long overdue, and the police really need a headquarters; that was 2013. I guess he was sleeping like his partners, these people and them, you know, the rest of his administration. I guess they were sleeping.

So, Madam President, the Government acquired, by way of purchase **(applause)**, the building formally known as the "Lime Building" on the Carenage, the telephone company building. **(Applause)** We now have a spanking new and permanent home as the headquarters for the Police Force **(applause)**, and they have moved in. They moved in earlier this month.

Madam President, similarly, the Grenville Police Station is under renovation. Carriacou has been renovated. Other... St. Paul's has been renovated. Work has to be done, and I've been and am being planned for a new prison complex, Madam President.

And let me say, in relation to the police officers, in relation to the police officers, I know they've never had it so good. Madam President, the police have new spanking headquarters. The police got a pay and grade. **(Applause)** Madam President, the police

have been waiting for pay and grade since 1995, you know. They were again sleeping on the job. So the pay and grade, and the lowest level of police officers, the constables, they're getting an increase of up to EC$700. **(Applause)** Madam President, they have secured the best collective agreement ever, complete with comprehensive information on uniforms, health insurance, and More.

And so, Madam President... **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Sorry. Okay. So, Madam President, I think what we have been able to accomplish in the last one and a half years, Madam President, when compared to what was not accomplished in the 23 years prior. Madam President, I think, and we know it, we see it, we get the feedback from the people of Grenada, we are doing well. **(Applause)** We are delivering. You know, we campaigned. We said what we're going to do, and now we're doing it. Some say, "Well, you all are just checking boxes". Well, yes, we're doing what we said we're going to do.

So, Madam President, I look forward to the coming year to continue to serve the people of Grenada in my capacities as Attorney General and Minister for Legal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Affairs and in any other capacity required by the Honourable Prime Minister of me.

And so... **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Of course, that goes without saying, right? **(Laughter)** Just now that I'll be in the "Other Place". **(Laughter)** So, I look forward to continuing, Madam President, as well, to work with the stakeholders in the tripartite labour arrangement. I think I can say openly that I do have a good relationship, and the Department of Labour has a good relationship with both other stakeholders. I see us working well together to move Grenada forward, to move labour forward, to move the Ministry of Legal Affairs forward, to build a new consumer affairs culture, and to move the Town of St. George forward, with all the initiatives that we have planned.

So, Madam President, with that, I commend and support, unreservedly, the Motion before this Honourable House. Thank you, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Motions: 2025 Budget Debate
Senator the Honourable Mondy André Lewis

Madam President: I thank the distinguished Senator, the Honourable Claudette Joseph, for her report on the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the wider panoramic view as they all relate to the 2025 Budget.

I dare say that we have had to extrapolate what it means for you going forward, but I must warmly congratulate you on your staff for the accomplishments. I, too, if I might be allowed to, would be proud of Grenada's representation before the [11]ICJ, on climate change, for the advisory opinion, but I will quickly chastise your junior officer for not telling me that Grenada was going to do so because they know that it is in my interest.

In fact, the former president of the ICG has just become the president of Lebanon, and it's through his office that I got the praises of Grenada. Congratulations on that initiative. It will help not only our country, but also the hundred presentations or submissions, I think we anticipate some. I don't know if I should go so far as to say relief, but certainly some hearing.

Many other accomplishments. I really do think that the Drafting Committee has served this Parliament very well. I want to thank them, and I want to thank those responsible for putting on the agenda of Grenada extended maternity leave and paternity leave; a step forward. Very good. But as I said, I want to hear about how this budget impacts where you plan to go.

We have one more speaker in our general debate, and with gladness, I offer the floor to the Labour Senator in the Senate, Senator the Honourable André Mondy Lewis. You have to floor Senator.

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Thank you very much, Madam President. It is always an important session and discussion when we meet to discuss matters of national interest, especially the budget, albeit we are probably three or four months, sort of late, I mean, understandably so. However, I must say that from an overall objective, in reviewing the budget, I got the impression that we may have rushed. I'll explain what I

[11] International Court of Justice

mean, although we had more time.

In reviewing the Estimates, I normally go to the main aspect. In looking at the introduction, which I found very important under the explanatory notes, the people who did the preparation had given notice that, based on the fact that they were going into a new cloud-based budget management system, they were faced with certain challenges. It is formed on page seven, explanatory notes. Some things are not properly lined up.

I also found that there is a number of missing items in the document itself. It is something I pointed out in the last budget debate. There are a number of column items, figures, and numbers that are missing. You had headings and subheadings, but it was not populated. If you look under the Ministry of Health and under the General Hospital, you will see this, and I find it's time that we pass those stages, to be quite frank with you, because we come here to make informed decisions. So I'm making that appeal, notwithstanding the challenges posed by the new system, I don't think that that can excuse the lack of information. And time permitted, I will just highlight some.

However, I will just, for my colleague, minister, highlight and thank her, through you, Madam President, for so eloquently justifying the movement of the EC$15,000 to EC$100,000 in terms of procurement. I think the last time it became so was in 2013, was it, or 2014? 2014. Not wanting to prolong the meeting or this discussion, I will not say, "and I quote". Yes? **(Laughter)** But I will simply say, it is more than my understanding that what was said was that the past administration slept on the job, relative to this, taking into account the astronomical increases in the cost of goods and services over time.

It therefore means that it made sense and you had to, out of necessity, move from EC$15,000 to EC$100,000, almost a seven-fold increase. Seven by 15 is 105. Almost a seven-fold increase. Now, if we juxtapose that against the impact of cost of living, because it's goods and services... That is why we in the labour movement could never understand, never ever understand, why it is, even in this budget preparation, it is said that the CPI was a 1. 7% increase, roughly, around there.

Now what that means is that... **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Yes, yes, yes. One year. No, that's okay. That's okay, but there's a trend from the past 10 or 14

years, and even if you look at how we move in terms of our GDP, it ranges between 3% and 4% over that period. We have not gone above that, and that is one of the reasons why, as has been identified by the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, the region needs to have an increase in GDP of over 6% to really move the economy, because there has been that steady trend. So I just wanted to highlight that.

Also, my friend, as the Attorney General, not as Minister for Labour now, knows that the Beharry case is pending appeal. The Beharry case, relative to the judgment that came out, yes, that's the law now, and in some other forum, I heard quite clearly, selectively choosing her words, which, in my interpretation, again left it open that there's a high possibility and probability that it may be reversed.

Madam President: I invite the Deputy President of the Senate to take the Chair.

Mr. Deputy President (Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox): Thank you, Madam President. Senator, you may proceed.

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Thank you.

Sergeant-at-Arms: The Deputy President in the Chair.

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Thank you. Thank you very much. I must commend and I'm glad that they're still around, if I may, the leadership on the ground level, the floor level, of the Ministry of Labour, the Labour Commissioner and her staff, for certainly increasing and improving the quality of service that has been delivered by the ministry. **(Applause)**

And we do not have to agree with the ruling, well, not ruling, the recommendation that comes from the ministry. What is important for us is getting timely recommendations, at the same time, ones that are not biased. So I'm saying, when you say it does not matter, certainly, one will want to see objectivity continuously. So, one, I've seen an

improvement there and therefore, commendation must be given.

The Minister for Labour has indicated that over the past year or two years, we have seen an improvement in the industrial relations climate, and that's true, that's true, and I want to underline, that's true. But I ask of you in the interest of all of us, although progress is born out of struggle, so we will not move away from it, just as the pension horse was used and ridden to come into office, if the Government creates a new one with amendments to the dispute resolution process, it'd be a bigger industrial relations horse to ride.

And I wish to remind the population that a number of us, even on "That Side", stood on top Market Hill in the 1990s, when the police beat us with barbed wire and truncheon over the dispute resolution issue. The Essential Services Act was limited to a few companies. What is being attempted now will even make teachers and all the different professions, essential services, in effect... **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Allow me to finish. Yes.

It means therefore, because, you see, and probably that's what they may be missing, and I'm glad on the "Other Side" you said, no. The effect of essential services is that when you have an industrial dispute, the matter can be sent to arbitration whether the parties agree to or not. That's the essential difference, so bear that in mind. So, if that didn't come across when we spoke to you all before, please bear in mind that I'm saying this. The essential difference between a slave and a free man is knowing what to do with one's labour.

As we speak, as we speak, as we speak, there is that dispute that is heading to arbitration, and therefore, I'll be very guarded in how I go into the details for obvious reasons. But you can't accuse us of withdrawing our labour as we want when companies are doing their own thing, when they should be allowing the status code to remain.

In other words, you know why it is always labour they're blaming, because we make more noise, and that's what we have to do, that's what we have. We don't have the capital. We are not the ones who are paying. We are not the ones who are hiring.

So, when you force us into arbitration and you expect us to sit and wait, but the companies can go ahead and do what they want, and the very same matters are pending before arbitration, what do you expect us to do, and then we are accused of breaking procedure? I'm yet to hear this Administration and other administrations call out companies and say you are breaking procedures. It is always labour, but that will not daunt us. We desire industrial peace, but we desire industrial justice.

And just as our founding fathers were able to face all the different threats, blood, sweat, and tears, and even life, giving up life for what we have today, because our collective bargaining agreements are a reflection of the progress that we have made over the years, from slavery to now. This is what guides the relationship between us workers, labour and capital.

Therefore, anything, anything that seeks to change that balance, because it's about equity. I was using an example, I think it was someone in the Ministry of Labour, but we were discussing a matter, and I said, "If I had EC$100 to share between two people who require transportation, one is living in St. Patrick and the other is living in Grenville. If I take that EC$100 and I give each one of them EC$50, I've shared it equally, but the transport from St. Patrick may be EC$60 and from Grenville may be EC$40 to get to St. George. If I give them EC$50, EC$50, it is not equity".

Therefore, this is where industrial relation comes in, and I'm making that appeal in this House, do not change this imbalance. Do not change this balance. Out of the hundreds of companies that are represented in this country, how many times do you hear...? And I heard the minister in another forum speak about looking for industrial peace, and that's interesting because I can tell you. The private sector, they said, the new process is designed to get industrial peace, and I understand that. The private sector, long before this current Government came into office, a few months before the election, their leadership, together with the leading private sector in the south of the island, the hotel sector, in my presence at the Ministry of Labour, lamented the fact that this matter is not yet resolved.

You see, that's part of the objective that they have. Administrations in the past have always refused to do it, but it's instructive for us. Colleagues on the "Other Side", this is not party politics, I'm speaking here. Please bear with me. It is most of the time when this Administration is in office that you find what you call structural changes, legal changes, and legislative changes that shift the balance unevenly so, many times, because what we have is our labour. In the 1900s, as I have indicated…

In October of 2022... In October or November of 2022, when there was industrial action on the port, it was the first time in years... It was the first time I've ever seen or we have ever seen, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, feeling really powerful and strong because in their view, there's an administration or leadership that will listen to them. Do not forget who used to represent them. These are historical facts, and we all do that. We looked for advantages, which is called lobbying. Are you following me? Within the first day or two, and the Minister for Labour knows that, they put a press release calling on the state to take immediate action to bring in the police or to do whatever it is. Right? They said, indicating that this was the first time that they were speaking publicly on matters like this so soon.

Then we had Hubbards; Hubbards or whichever company with a profit share. The issue with the profit sharing, and thankfully, the Labour Minister did the right thing, which was not surprising, but I understood the different challenges because we spoke. Right? They felt emboldened, and we need to ask ourselves, why is it, after all these years, because it was years ago they were trying that, but they never made it public. We know that. They felt emboldened to do that.

When our workers were locked out of the Grenada Breweries in 2011 and or 2012, who was in office? I'm saying if we are not careful, every time this Administration is in office, there are legislative issues that pop up that are fundamental to workers.

I'm making this pronouncement because the minister has once again said that those changes will come across in the second quarter, thereabout. I know Labour wrote, signed all the unions, so it is up to this Administration where you want this industrial relation to go, on this matter, because this is about a fundamental... Yes, there are

challenges. There are challenges with enforcement. Yes? But what we have found is even, even, even in essential services where you have arbitration and everything, there are loopholes.

I'm saying that our fundamental rights, we can work together, we can continue discussing these matters. We can work together, we can continue discussing these matters, but when we look throughout the region in the countries that have those, as in Trinidad, I'll just call two names, because that's what we deal with for life. That's what we have dealt with, and we are connected throughout the region. The militancy of the workers has been stifled, legislatively, and there will come a time, as with all human ventures, when there will be resistance; it may not be good for society, but it will be useful for society. We have a history. Grenada has its own unique history. I'm just resting this there for whatever its worth.

As it relates directly to the budget, that is all part of it; there is no doubt that the budget is a deficit budget, but sources of finance have been identified. I mean, I think we could all accept that. In other words, it's a deficit budget, but its sources of financing have been identified. So to say it is not a deficit budget is not, is not properly speaking, if we want to educate the people that are listening, because you see it is true you didn't have current account deficit, because if you had a current account deficit technically, is considered to be bankrupted, so you can't have that, just as an observation.

You know, it's a pity. I will speak to him, and I know he'll know that's my colleague, who normally sits to my left, the Private Sector Representative. He is not here. But in terms of his presentation, if I have to grade it, I will grade it as one of the best budget presentations I have heard. Remember, I didn't say... I said, "A budget presentation". I think you can, I mean, on the "Other Side," you can use him. You know what I mean? It was really eloquent, right, in terms of the budget presentation. Underline my word "budget presentation". Right.

Colleagues, the private sector observed, according to the private sector, because that's the voice of the private sector, everything is good. They can't find workers to work, so it have a lot of work outside there, but I can tell you, in many private sector companies,

they will tell you that when they send out notices for applicants, the amount of applications that they are receiving is much more than the jobs that they have.

That is why Senator Andrew may have identified and accepted that our education system requires some realigning, because the jobs that are available, some of our people may not be best suited for it. So it is not necessarily correct to say that the place is filled up. The question of scarcity of labour, especially in construction, and I had to stop over and over looking to import labour, it has a lot to do with the issue that in some of these construction companies and sites, the way they want to treat workers without paying overtime on a Saturday, Sunday, on a evening, Grenadians won't work for that.

It is the history of immigrants. We leave and we go to the US and we go to Canada and we do the jobs that the locals will not do because we go with an objective to beat the midnight oil and take the hot sun and the cold because we have an objective. It is the same way that they treat us. In some instances, they don't pay us properly because we are hiding. Yes.

So, I can tell you that on many construction sites, a number of people do not wish to work with some employers because they work late, and the ministry knows that. My colleague, I mean, I'll just thief a little chance because I see you all turning from time to time as I speak.

The ministry and the Labour Commissioner know that. The number of cases that they have with employers refusing to pay the proper rate, overtime, and even the minimum wage, and because we are living in Grenada, for a number of these workers, it is better for they to sit at home, because of the cost of getting ready to go to work. There's a cost for getting ready to go to work, you know, apart from transport, dress, eating, getting up, organising your home; some of them refused to go, because as we speak about unemployment being so low, and we walk around the blocks, and we see so many people on the blocks.

Now, I know technically, although it was my dear colleague who questioned, context is key, who questioned, I think it was Senator Andrew. If it is not you, it is one of you all, so I'm just using you **(laughter)** who question the Government information relative

to the definition of "youth unemployment". Am I correct? Yes. Talking about the age of 15, I think maybe it is included in that. So you see, even from the "Government Side", you are questioning your own information. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Well, yes. It is information. It is through definition that we will come up with positions, you know. Based on the definition, we can make pronouncements. You see, context is key. If we don't have the correct definition, then we'll have the wrong content.

Colleagues, Labour is making the proposal that you look to reduce the income tax from 28% to 25%.

There's an issue about overtime for a number of workplaces, and it took me a number of years. My colleagues in different companies who have always been telling me about it, and I've been debating with them, I finally understood over the last few months and years what you were saying.

It serves as a disincentive. Once you go into that tax bracket, let's say the the 28%, which is over EC$5,000 a month, yes EC$5,000 and more, it therefore means, every thousand dollars you make EC$28 automatically goes to the state and for the worker, he or she is seeing this, will say, "Well, that doesn't make any sense to me. I'm getting up early. I am reaching home later. I have to leave my family". So some mechanism, in our view, ought to be found to address that issue. It impacts productivity. Some workers are refusing to work because it places them in a different tax bracket, and therefore, they get less.

Under the budget statement, I wouldn't call the page because I were using an electronic version and it does not align with the hard copy. I'll call the number. 3. 1 - Development of Grenada's Hydrocarbon Potential. We are looking forward to reading the comprehensive update. I mean, it was very scarce on information, and the reason why we are looking forward is that it provides an opportunity for creating employment. So we look forward to this.

On the Kawana Bay Project Site and Expansion, we haven't seen any timeline. I mean, it just says that this is being done. I mean, we are speaking here. It is good to give us a timeline. I mean, you know, so it's useful. It is important. Don't allow us to feel

that we are just pulling things just to say things. Give us some information.

On the question of the reform of the Marketing and National Importing Board, we see the new name that is being proposed. We want to know whether or not there was any consultation held with these stakeholders, for instance, the farmers, et cetera. We recognise that it says, "import-export". What is the main objective? Is it import or export, or is it just names? We want to know what the main objective is behind this.

Under the question of Public Sector Pension Reform, I'm making this appeal. There are other matters that we will address, which everyone is aware of, the question of the sort of Beharry approach and the workers who are working in established positions like in the hospital, and the nurses who you are not yet being addressed, yes, because, you know, once you make them permanent, as they ought to have been made, they would have been entitled to the 1958 pension, but you have not done that.

And I am wondering, when I listened to Senator Charles, and I found her to be extremely detailed and data-driven based on the information that she gave, I wondered and I am still wondering whether or not a number matters in the hospital that are not addressed because the objective is to statutorise and therefore there will be a continued cry for what you call new management, because it is not adding up.

I'll tell you something, colleagues. I said so before, and I'll see it again. After the change in administration, I said, "Yes, we will now move away from what we consider, a number of us, a concrete, focused administration". There is no doubt that, in terms of infrastructure development under the past administration, the focus was a lot on that. We found that where they were lacking was in the human resource aspect, and listening to the new administration, I said, "Yes", and we said, "Yes". But in almost every post I see, in almost every high praise I see from the administration, MIT is about the same thing. Why can't we have those positive reports in terms of implementation, in terms of healthcare? It is possible. It is doable once you make that focus. We are almost three years in.

You created a completely new institution, a ministry to unblock the pipes, but where it is clogged in the Ministry of Health has not been unblocked. These are essentials. I'm

sure the population will be prepared to undergo some challenges in other aspects of life if our healthcare is given parity. It affects all of us.

So, under the Public Sector issue, I am making an appeal. The Administration said that the pension reform was designed to prevent people from going home into poverty, and we said, "Yes, okay. Good". But you have disqualified hundreds of people, if not thousands, certainly, hundreds of people. Remember that age group and those years of service? If you've given 15 years of service and more, and if you are 50 years and above, you are excluded from the new reform, in terms of what is called the past service, et cetera.

These people are going home into poverty. The very sad thing that you are saying you're seeking to do, so it is not correct to say that you have addressed the issue of poverty of the people going home. These people who are given 15 years of service and are 50 years or above, under the new reform, are not entitled to it. We are making this request of you to address this issue because they are our mothers, our sisters, our brothers, our fathers, who have given years of service to this country.

Let me go back to a point made by the Private Sector Representative. The Private Sector Representative, in responding to the position adopted or proposed by the Government, refers to what we call, stiff penalties for people who do not pay their taxes. He said, "These things," or words to that effect, "Are draconian, ease up on this". Come on, man, I mean, if you don't pay your tax, what do you expect? Not only this, not only this.

Under the current tax regime, the law allows a taxpayer to apply for an extension before the deadline. In this case, interest would not be charged. So before interest is charged, if you make an application for extension, we know the interest. If taxpayers, especially businesses, do the right thing, then there'll be no need for the imposition of penalties.

As a matter of fact, what we should do, and what I'm doing, is a call for the resources to be given to the IRD Department to enforce those things, so make sure that people comply, make sure that the business complies. Two years ago, we were given

tax amnesty, and we are back here in 2012 or 2013, thereabout, or in 2021, there was another tax amnesty. So if we enforce the tax laws, it will do well for all of us.

Sergeant-at-Arms: Madam President in the Chair.

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Well, I addressed the issue about our economy not being able to grow beyond 4% over the last three or four years. According to the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, who, I dare say, is the ECCB Monetary Council, I expect all of them to resign, possibly. If the Governor is being singled out for the authorisation or the spending of that money that he cannot do on his own, I would expect collective responsibility, and those in the leadership of the region that is calling for his help should be calling for the Minister of Finance and everyone to take the same responsibility and walk. I just thought I should plug that in there. Yes?

Colleagues, our information is that the Policy Unit in the Ministry of Finance. A number of people left; in terms of experience, there are new people. So it is impacting the work of the Policy Unit. I am making this appeal for urgent attention to be placed there. We are also calling for a rebasing of the items of goods in the basket of goods. It may have been 10 or 13 years ago, so we are asking for the rebasing to be done.

The information says that there is a consumer price decline in 2024 from the previous high levels in 2023. I ask each one here, Madam President, I'm not sure I could ask you that, but I will venture still, as we are all Grenadians. I'm waiting to hear if anyone here can tell me if the money that they were going to the supermarket with last year, if they go with the same amount this year, and if they could get the same amount of goods that they got last year. This is saying that we have a decline. I ask each and every one of my colleagues on the "Other Side" to ponder on this because we all go to the supermarket.

The unemployment rate is low. As I said, I'm seeing a number of people around. The scientists and those behind, the professionals in terms of issues surrounding unemployment, say that unemployment could also be impacted by not just a mismatch

sometimes, although defined in some instances as whether or not you're actively looking for work. Sometimes you can reach a stage where you are no longer actively looking for work because you have lost confidence in the system. In other words, you have made so many attempts to get a job or even the job that you get sometimes can't make ends meet, so you just give up. So these things are important, as policymakers, for us to review to see how best we can help address those issues. Therefore, interventions on the blocks and discussions on the blocks will be important in terms of the community discussions. The Ministry of Social Services and the minister would be important in addressing issues because I know you care about ordinary people. Right. I'm not making a case for you to be the one in that place; you all will sort that out. **(Laughter)** Right. Yes, I'm saying I know you care about people. **(Laughter)** We do read the TV reviews. **(Laughter)** You know what I mean.

Under Grant, that's table 1 of the budget, total grants. The grants received in 2024 were EC$2. 1 million. I see we are now projecting EC$13. 3 million in terms of budgetary support, so we would like to know where these would come from.

Now, although the sources of finances have been identified to address the deficit, a major concern that we have is that when you keep dipping into the reserves when that is depleted, what will happen in the case of an external shock? It is Labour's plea that we do not do anything to bring us back into going to a structural adjustment programme, because every time we are the ones who have to carry these challenges and these sacrifices.

We see the suspension in the FRA until 2027. Beryl has been the stand-up figure for this; when I think it is about 16% of the GDP that was impacted. Grenada was not put on hold. Grenada was functional, and if Beryl causes us to suspend all the rules until 2027, we have to start wondering now what the issue is behind that. What is the issue behind that, and it's anybody's guess as to what may be a major factor coming up. So even if these things have been done, it is understandable that if things are tight with you, then you're going to your reserves, that's understandable.

But we are asking for caution and prudence, and not to be just dipping and spending because it is there. I think we could all agree. The "Other Side" could also agree, "This Side" of the aisle could agree, that it is because of the FRA that brought certain restrictions on the lavish spending of the Government, including the past one that used to be spending all over the place, my partner Cox and them. Right. Senator, and he knows that. The [12]FRA came in to put certain measures in place that assisted us to be able to dip, and this Administration to find, that's why you met probably a pregnant treasury. Right. But remember, in all pregnancies there will be a birth. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Yes, some take longer, some come before, and sometimes, it all depends on how you beat yourself up; it might come faster than. So we're just sending this as a caution. We are prepared to make sacrifices, but it just becomes overbearing. When you pass a deficit budget, it creates doubt for investors and the international community.

6.2 – Accelerating our Transformative Agenda. To be quite frank with you, colleagues, we are looking at the budget. I've not seen anything to be wowed about. I see it as a maintenance, you know. Maintenance... But in terms of what you're speaking about, accelerating, you know, that's 6.2 – Accelerating our Transformative Agenda. Madam President, I heard you keep asking the question over and over. I'll venture to answer it.

I have not found the budget to be in line with what one will call "transformative". In other words, to be able to take us on a leap. It is maintaining the status quo, **(applause)** right, in its challenges. Right. So, I've not been able to see. Yes, it has moved to one point something what, billion? EC$1. 9 billion. Fifteen years ago, it was about EC$700 and... It didn't reach EC$1,000,000,000. So it took about 15 years to get there right, I think it was 2009, thereabouts. So I have not seen it. I've looked at it and gone through the different issues.

Increase access to Education. As we increase the access, my brother and friend,

[12] Fiscal Resilience Act

Senator Andrew, it is also important to increase the quality, yes, the quality output. I know you have identified that. I know you have identified that.

But permit me, through you, Madam President, my Minister, I say "My Minister" ought to have a series of experiences. Were you Chief Education Officer under the past administration? So you have been there and done that? So, in other words, you ought to have... And I am calling you out so that you will go back into the memories, right, to see those challenges that you had at that time or your ministry had and see if we can tweak it if it was not implemented, to see what can be done. So you have an advantage, you have an advantage, and I expect to see you continue to do that work.

Under the Expanding and Diversifying of an Economic Base. I see it is very informal, but we want to encourage the formalisation of that sector in order to reduce the size of the informal sector.

Colleagues, very quickly, I must address... If we go now onto the Estimates. What I address here were items identified directly from the budget statement. If we go to the Estimates, table 12, page 50, List of Vacancies for 2025, I see on page 70 a total of 1,609 vacancies. We would like to know, and probably the Leader of the Government's Business, and that could help us make a better pronouncement on the budget, whether or not it's the intention to fill all these positions in 2025. That's under List of vacancies 2025, a total of 1609 vacancies.

But what is interesting is that under the Ministry of Health, under the list of vacancies, remember we have not regularised or made permanent any height of nurses and medical people. Yes? We are seeing a total of 241 vacancies. Registered nurses, I'm seeing 24. So I'm just calling the figures, so colleagues... Nursing Assistants, 30; District medical officers, 18; Junior Pharmacists 11; Staff Nurse, 13; and Mental Health, 64.

Under the Ministry of Agriculture, Senator St Clair, I'm seeing that there are 130 vacancies for 2025. Ministry of Education 168, minister; Ministry of Finance 153; and under the Police 193. That's why I'm asking if all of these are intended to be filled.

You can see the document didn't give us that sort of information, and I know you

keep asking the question, but don't hold us here. Let me rephrase that. Because the colleagues on the "Other Side", the ministers, my understanding is that I expect it to be developed after the minister makes his or her presentation to say what will be done.

I mean, the last person before me, and that's why I say the Town of St. George was a real campaign speech. You know what I mean, but I understand that.

So I am saying, we can't. It is difficult for us. Remember, we are not in the bowels of the administration. We don't have the first-hand data. When they do not spend the time, I'm not telling them what to do; that's entirely up to them, but as the President of the Senate, you keep asking that question, you keep asking that question, I can't help much. I could respond to that information, which I know. So I made an overall impression of the budget, but in terms of what we call detailed information, it is lacking, so that's why we're asking these.

Under the General Hospital. If we all agree, and we must agree that health must be a priority. In our view, it should be one, but the minister said, "Okay, it is Education". Right. If you get sick while you're studying... Understand the context.

Under Key Priorities, that is Vote 50, page 868, so I'm making it easy for colleagues. Key Priorities and Strategies it is totally blank. So it is no wonder that Health is in the state that it is.

I think about two years ago, when sitting close to where the AG sits right now, I wouldn't say the dismissed minister, I can't say that, when he lamented the fact as Minister of Health of the challenges, and I say, "Well, you shouldn't be there". And I'm saying right now we are here, we are here, and there's absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing under the Key Priorities and Strategies of 2025. It is totally blank. How could I come and make a pronouncement on the intention? I would have to conclude that, well, no one seems to care. This is not me.

Go to page... I'm making it easy for the listening public and for all my colleagues here, who I know will share my view. I don't sit in Cabinet, but I want to be able to make some pronouncement and give some advice in this House. I can't. Totally, totally blank. As a matter of fact, no achievement was listed in 2024, and probably that's true. This is

not me.

In that document, that have some issues with lining up, so I took a straight edge and I tried to line up because they say in the beginning, they had some issues with the format and zilch, zero, nada... How could I make a pronouncement, we are here in 2025, what do I know, it is necessary to increase or decrease the amount allocated for Health and the others when there's no report from this in terms of making a comparison? We need to do better than that. We are really concerned with the quality of the information provided for this debate.

Under Pension and Gratuities in 2023, I think it was 2023 or 2024, there was a breakdown as to what the 1958 is, what you call this, separate from NIS, et cetera, everything is lumped right now under the 2025.

Under Appendix 1, I want to applaud the Ministry of Labour, as I said, for looking to increase the manpower. Yes. I wish to do that, and I know the Labour Commissioner has been clamouring for that. Yes.

Madam President: People power. People power. People power, not just manpower.

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Sorry. Yes. I stand corrected by that. **(Laughter)** No, I stand by people power, or I will go further to now say womanpower because the Labour Commissioner is a woman, so I can safely say that because I'm speaking directly for you, but I'll be guided by you by saying people power.

They were looking to increase from 15 to 24 by nine established positions, so that's commendable. Although these positions will not be entitled to the 1958 pension. Yes. Some? Maybe? But then that's what we are saying, why didn't we do the right thing first by going through the process and determining all who qualify to be under the established position before we came in with the 2024 reform, because another headache that is going to end up in court. We keep kicking the tin down.

Obviously, 500 people or more got the pension, and that must be applauded because we marched in the streets for that. We didn't get that because any Government wanted to give it, you know. We got that because we marched the streets for years, and we had industrial dispute unrest for years. Yes. **(Inaudible comment by Senators)**

Well, I am glad that this current Administration got the heart because I'll tell you, Hermilyn Armstrong won a case in 2011 that the party that was in office then did nothing about, and that is where the battles started. So, I'm just saying, right, for historical purposes. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)**

No, but you are speaking about 23 years ago. You see, you can't do that. You can't determine, Madam President, when it is feasible for you to talk about 23 years; I can't talk about ten years. **(Laughter)** I heard my colleague, although I was not there, and my absence from the Senate had to do with it, an industrial matter, and I thought my colleague minister would have been in solidarity with me, being in the ministry with me, so I said both of us were missing the Senate. When I reach there, I recognise they had to bring out the document for it to be signed, and poor me down there, and the minister is up here. But anyhow, I understand. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)**

Yes, yes, yes. I know. I know. I do it, but I am good with that because you see, that is where I belong. What got me to this House here is not being here, you know, it's being on the street and being on the frontline. I would prefer to be absent from here while I'm doing the workers' work outside, but I will be respectful and send a notification that I can't make it. So it's not about me, it's about us and service.

I also found it interesting that with the pronouncement of one public service, there are still new positions that were created, which are called unestablished positions in the budget. Yes. Because we are moving from 119 to 136, that's under Appendix 1. It's the same thing, so I don't understand... I don't understand.

Now, let me go... I have about... Would I get the automatic...? Well, it's not automatic. The Standing Order says that the President may give 15 minutes more. It said, "May at your discretion". If you tell me no, I will know how to chop and cut. If you tell me what it is, then I will know how to...

Madam President: Thank you, Senator. According to your clock, you have 12 minutes left, from what I can see. What is your minimum additional requirement?

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Well, I wanted to ask for 20, but... **(Laughter)** No, I did that because I heard... **(Laughter) (Inaudible comment by a Senator)** No, I heard my colleague, who was a Trade Unionist, as a negotiator, ask you for 15.

Madam President: There are not...

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: No, but at your... To be honest with you, I can manage.

Madam President: 12 and eight will be 20 minutes. You want to try 20 in total?

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Okay, so 10. Thanks. 10 beyond the 12.

Madam President: Eight beyond the 12.

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Thank you. So eight past. I'm making a request. This is not about politicking. This is about human beings. The Chinese houses it was given to us to give to people. Let me repeat. It was given to us to give to people who can't afford it.

I heard when one of my colleagues on "This Side" was presenting, a comment was made on the "Other Side" that all have been sold to Grenadians, and that's okay, whether you are in the diaspora or not, Grenadians. However, if it comes at the expense of people looking for homes and they can't get ordinary Grenadians, we can't support that. How will our Chinese comrades feel?

Therefore, I'm saying if. As we speak in Carriacou, there are people still sleeping under tents and tarpaulins, and if there are places where they can get a more comfortable rest in these houses, if they are not occupied, then why not, then why not? I'm harbouring a guest. If it is people who are in dire need of housing and all the houses have been sold, most of them would have been occupied. Prove me wrong, and I'm willing to back off.

Our Cuban brothers and sisters, who, in spite of the worst economic blockade and warfare against them, go to all parts of the world to help people. The Chinese Communist Party, which took the majority of people out of poverty, gave us these houses. If we are guided by just selling and leaving out people by saying that they will get houses some other time, and the human factor didn't come into play first, it is difficult to stomach this.

No, if I am wrong, tell me I'm wrong. I've been asking that for the past year. I've been saying this, if the people who have received those houses, yes, if there are people who require houses and the fact that they couldn't get it because they couldn't access a loan, but they qualified for it in terms of the living condition, I'm saying they ought to be given first. I agree with the Government to put systems in place to ensure that people are paid yes to maintain their house, but if it is the case that people who are not qualified for a loan, but are in dire need of a good living condition and who under the past procedures would have received those houses, then it is difficult for us representative of workers, to accept that.

I do remember hearing in some places, by this team, I'm just saying that, not being provocative, but just to respond to... Apparently, my colleagues on the "Other Side" may have had some memories. I do remember hearing about 500 houses per parish, and then it was 500 for the year. Yes? **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Five hundred per parish was said on the campaign trail. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** What!? **(Laughter)** Sorry, Madam President. No, you see, when they come across here... Sorry. **(Laughter)** Okay, Madam President. I am going on.

I want to applaud the Administration for the approach of the First-Generation Scholarship. I like the thought process. In other words, it shows, and this is what I call, wow. I'm not seeing it in the budget, all I'm seeing is the overall budget, but I'm saying

issues like this, issues like this when you will take a policy position and try to put it in practice whereby you identify the homes, right, that no one has ever graduated from a university and you're making this as a policy and a practical approach you must be applauded. **(Applause)** There is no doubt that we do look up to our elder brothers and sisters from the households, and many times you can see it, and that's the impact that SGU has had and continues to have on the South.

I have been speaking to a number of my colleagues from Jamaica, and they spoke about how the location where the UWI Campus is and how years before that, the level of poverty and illiteracy, et cetera, that we're in that area and the positive impact that the university, the atmosphere, have had on the immediate community, and these must be applauded. So any household that someone can look up a niece, nephew, a brother and say, "Look, wow, he went to university", right, "I want to do that too, that could only be good for us", and therefore that must be applauded. Yes?

On the question of productivity, the employer class tends to want to beat up us, workers, many times. There is a management issue that is comforting the workplaces. If you have good management, you'll put systems in place that you can monitor work, you will give work, you will coach, you will emulate, and you will have training.

Yesterday, I attended the funeral service of a dear Grenadian veteran, comrade Selwyn Coutain, a former employee of the telephone company, GRENTEL, Cable and Wireless. It was a very good turnout from those of us who worked in this company. The day before that, we buried another veteran, Drew Adams, from St David. Our Grenadian soldiers are dying like everybody else, but they are veterans, and that's why they stand out. Therefore, we look forward to it, as it is all part of the workers' issue, the official monuments for the Grenadian soldiers. Why have I reached there?

You know, we were reminiscing yesterday, and the issue of customer service came up. I said, "Wow, it is such a far cry from the days when we were in the company". One of the major differences is that in those days, the company and companies in Grenada invested in training, so you went through different levels of customer service training.

I mean, the basic human being, responsible, respectable human being would have

the basic foundation that you build upon, but the aspect of how you deal with pressure, how you deal with high-rate customers, et cetera, requires training many times, and therefore, if the companies do not invest in this, you have a difficulty.

So when they speak about the lack of productivity and low productivity, transportation comes into play. When you drive along that road from north of the island, the eastern corridor, the western side of the island, workers can't get to work on time, and I applaud the Government's effort to try to address the issues with school children because Labour has been clamouring for that for years, so the pilot project to address school children is commendable. But we are of the view that something can be done faster and ought to have already been done to address the issue of national transportation.

We call on the business community, especially those in the hotel sector. Tourism, I'll tell you, is not everybody's business. Tourism is the business of those who own the hotels in the south. Most of the workers are paid the minimum wage, and they have to walk to go home. How much would it take from the hoteliers and those especially in the south and other parts of the island, where, especially our women folk, and I'm going to make a distinction, because our society is not yet advance to that level of where, in other words, they will quicker attack a woman on the road, that's a fact, in terms of vulnerability, in terms of safety, so permit me, Madam President, to generalise it. How does a hotelier, who is recognised right throughout the world and as having one of the best hotels in the world, be it five-star, six-star, and probably six-point-something stars, seven stars, yes, how do they sleep at night? How do they feel accepting an award for the provision of service that is done by the very said workers, where the vast majority are women, but you don't care about their safety to reach home?

I can't say it any other way, and while the Government takes its merry time, and I'm saying merry time, because it's urgent enough to qualify it so, to address national transport even if to run at a particular time from 7 in the night, even if, and even if it takes to work out with the private bus owners an arrangement. I know, as a matter of fact, that they were bus associations that were prepared, and Senator Cox would remember that.

I chastise them when they did not have the bus association and others on the Transport Board. It was a disservice. Real chastise.

I'm therefore calling out the current Administration to engage. If you do not want to bring in a bus like what you call a PTS, or what you call them coaster buses, give some incentive to have whatever format that ply the main routes, and at the same time call out the hoteliers, and the others in the south, because the development in the island has been skewed heavily to the south, yes, skewed heavily to the south, and therefore the South is over weighted so our people have to leave the northern part of the island and make it down here. Then, because transportation is so expensive, the average worker pays 30-something per cent of the salary towards transport. We are not speaking about food and clothing yet, and then you have to bunk out in some places, and that makes them vulnerable... So, this is a human cry.

Colleagues, I am looking forward to that transformation, and it could be done, and it ought to be done. Unions have been discussing with some workplaces in which we have been making some progress, the provision of transport. There is one or two small incremental progress. But if these companies want concessions when hoteliers and other business places come into the country, the CBI fund or IMA... Is IMA now, right? Why can't we put aside a percentage of this money to throw it into transportation so that we can address the issue of productivity? The streets are lined with school children, also. I know there is a pilot project, but the others are still going to school late because they go with their parents.

If we seriously want to address the issue of productivity, it starts with moving from one place to the other. It is not a logistical issue. Yes, there will always be challenges at the workplace; that's why you have structures, you have managers, and you have supervisors, because it is accepted by all of us. If the President doesn't pull up on us from time to time, we will talk across the aisle, right, and we wouldn't speak when we have to speak **(laughter)** because it is understood. No, it's a human factor. So at the workplace, you have supervisors who ought to be part of the overall objective of the company. After discussing with workers, you have plans, you have targets, you identify

the resources and tools needed, and you get them bought.

Madam President, we are booked in places, not just myself alone, that have that down to a "T". It enhances your discipline, and you look forward to going to work because you know what the achievement is and what the objectives are. Therefore, you can sit with your supervisor, some say chief, some say boss. I don't say boss, but it's not me I'm speaking about. "Look, you know, I can't do 'x or y' because I don't have the tools, or you can't do 'x or y' because you don't have the training".

And the appraisal is done quarterly, where you identify weaknesses and challenges, and then there's a plan, just as there's a plan for maintaining vehicles, if you don't... These companies send their vehicles in to be re-service and at a scheduled time, so why can't we have the retooling of our workers from time to time? Let us make preparations to be able to help retool and retrain our workers because that will improve and increase our productivity. It will increase our GDP.

We have a direct, biased and selfish interest. Labour has that interest, selfish, if we must say, for increasing productivity, and an increase in our gross domestic product, but we are calling for the fair distribution of the wealth, because I can tell you, the world is not worse off today because there is less to go around. There's more to go around. Elon Musk and those of this world are 10 times or so richer than the world before the crisis. A number of companies in Grenada have made many more.

Look at the statements from the banks. Look at them.

One of the banks that had its workers on the outside for weeks, Madam Minister, you had to deal with. If we force them to arbitration and they are not angry, they could tie it up, take that from me, because we have walked that road.

What broke them was when they challenged the workers, and they said, "Look, we will not pay you for the days out", and the workers came out with more guts and said, "You can take our pay, because there's a bigger fight we are fighting". Cause and effect.

So what we are calling for... I have three more minutes. I'll be done. What we are calling for is that approach, and that's the role of Labour. The role of Labour historically, which we need to continue doing, is to help create those balances to have an

even playing field. I look forward to the continued work. I know we are almost four months in, and whatever can be used from the budget to make life better for our people, let us continue to target the people who are more vulnerable.

And here again, Madam President, through you, I'm making an appeal to the Minister of Social Services, to please, the promises that were made... I clapped. I was in the back here. I clapped when it was said that whatever pass administration had out on the EC$150, I'll keep speaking about it, right, that came up to about EC$1800 for the year, please pay it back to these people.

The Carriacou Five. We said there's no victimisation, so we identify that some bureaucrat is not paying the Prime Minister his constituency allowance, right, and yet to go to court, and he's not firing anybody right, but the ordinary five sisters from Carriacou, I can't come up with any other word more than victimisation. **(Applause)** I can't, as much as I may try, because the letter that was written to them quoted Public Service rules, and under the Public Service rules, you must be given a hearing.

And I can tell you, and I know for a fact, that after they recognised the blunder that they made, it wasn't a blunder, but based on the objective, they changed all other letters that they wrote.

And the workers of Faith, who worked, I'll keep clamouring for them. Whether Miss Faith was here or not, I don't know. Yes? Go after the Faith Company and the owner of Faith, but ordinary workers, because the majority of things that you have done, through you, Madam Minister, are things that we fought for. Demonstrated to the ordinary working class man and woman, an ordinary villager, that it is not about big ticket items only, but you'll show that you have a heart, and therefore I make this plea as my eight-minute arrives, thank you, Madam President, and wish everyone all the very best. Thank you. **(Applause)**

Madam President: Thank you very much, Senator André Lewis. Your customary clarity and passion have come through. I think this brings us to the last Member of the

Senate to debate the Motion, and I offer the floor to the Leader of Government's Business in the Senate, Senator Adrian Thomas.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I really empathise with my fellow Senators who have really and truly stood up to the test of time for these two long days, and I really want to congratulate all those who have remained for the entire debate. **(Applause)** They are shown resilience and the commitment to really and truly be part and parcel of this process of building this beautiful country, and I want to applaud them sincerely.

Madam President, I am sure because every time I come to this House, I am being reminded over and over again that this Administration must be doing this, and this Administration must be doing that. Well, we take all that advice on board, but I want to warn this House and the general public that we can only do it bit by bit with all hands on deck. **(Applause)** Nobody in this country, and if you're brave enough, stand up and say that this Administration is an idle administration. We are not idle. From the time we took office in 2022, we have been working consistently in the interests of the Grenadian people, both at home and abroad. **(Applause)**

Madam President, before going to my response and my rebuttal, I want to say upfront how grateful I am for this opportunity, and I want to again thank the Ministry of Tourism, the Creative Economy and Culture, the GTA Grenada Tourism Authority and all stakeholders of this very important industry. Madam President, I want to single out two of my advisors, Mr. Orlando Romain and Mrs. Naline Joseph, who have been fantastic for the past year, and I expect to get a lot from them in the coming year.

Madam President, I want to thank the Senators for their contributions on both sides of the House. We have been taking notes. We really and truly are grateful for your contribution, and we'll make maximum use of it. **(Applause)** To you, Madam President, the Clerk and your staff, thank you very much.

Madam President, I will try my best not to be that long, but I do not want it to go unnoticed because, Madam President, the little scenario that we had in regards to the

objection of Senator Seville Francis, I really want to congratulate you for being so professional and calling us into your Chamber to discuss this very important matter. I really wanted to go on record. **(Applause)**

But, Madam President, I may have an observation, and I really don't want us to take it personally. I observe a very halfhearted withdrawal of what was said and what Senator Francis objected to. I am frightened because I do not want at any point in time for any action or inaction to appear as though we Senators are violating the orders of this House. **(Applause)** So I want to warn my colleagues that we have to be man enough and when we use language that is not appropriate for this House we must say sorry, Madam President, and show respect to the president at all costs, **(applause)** That is only how we will grow and we have to be man enough and say, "Yes, I'm sorry". **(Inaudible comment by a Senator) (Laughter)** "Mankind". I always learn from you, Andre. Thank you very much. So, Madam President, going forward, I hope you'll really and truly take my good advice.

Madam President, there was a big subject in this House here and also in the "Other Place" when the Budget debate was going on, the issue of cutting and slashing, and always on the "Opposition Side", and when I say the "Opposition Side", the "Other Side". I look at my Senator from Agriculture, for the Farmers and Labour, but you're on the "Other Side". You are not on the "Government Side".

Madam President, we conveniently select a line item in the budget and talk about cutting it in that particular area and cut it in this particular area. So we look at the police uniform, and if we budget EC$300,000 last year and we budget EC$150,000 this year, that's an issue.

But, Madam President, the real truth of the matter comes when we look at the budgetary allocation over all of last year, we realise we have a budget of EC$1.7 billion, we cutting and we slashing, and we look at the budget figures for 2025, we will realise that there is a budgetary allocation of EC$1.9 billion. Where is the cutting and the slashing? **(Applause)** Madam President, we have to be fair, truthful and not see things that conveniently. Madam... There is nothing wrong. We cannot continue going up the

ladder for every single item year after year. There comes a time when less... It could be more based on circumstances. We may have to shift resources. One of the fisherfolk may identify a pool of tuna, close to our shore, big money in Europe for us. We may have to immediately reallocate resources to the fishing folk and then send them after the tuna so we could export more and earn more foreign exchange, and that is the dynamics of a Government that is astute and ready to make the necessary adjustments in the interest of the Grenadian people. We're not afraid to change things around here. Line items, Madam President, in any budget, will change from time to time, and we are not afraid to change things.

Madam President, our dream is to bring a hospital into Grenada, which will take a lot of resources, and there will be more cutting and slashing in other areas to facilitate that dream. We will not starve our Grenadian people. We would not starve them. We will not deprive them of a livelihood, but at the end of the day, for the overall good, we will do what is necessary in moving this country forward, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Some people are very frightened in terms of getting out of the box. We're not afraid of that. When we talk about free lunches, free tuition, and scholarships and total scholarships across the board, this is getting out of the box. We are not remaining in the box, and every time school start to reopen, we hand-pick people and say, "Look, an envelope. EC$50, EC$100 or EC$200, buy something to go back to school". We have been doing that for decades, and it's not working.

The real impact, Madam President, will be seen in the free lunches, the free tuition, the free scholarships—one university graduate per home, first-generation, that is how our society will grow and develop. This piecemeal, transactional behaviour will not, and has proven time and time again, that it may satisfy the people who want votes, but it will not bring the country where we are to be. **(Applause)**

So we will think outside the box, Madam President. Some people believe that if we take on monumental projects, the people are going to starve, and there is a saying, “If you're waiting on the pasture to grow, and the grass to grow, the horse will starve”. We know how to grow, we know how to sectionise what we have, and while we're growing

the grass on the side, the horse will be maintained. The horse will be maintained. It will be useless not to put a structure in place to maintain and develop the growth of the animal, while we're growing grass. What are we growing grass for? Somebody stupid? We're not.

So, Madam President, we will go ahead with Project Polaris. We will work and make it work, and at the same time, 100% attention will be paid to the healthcare in the community of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique. Make no bones about that. **(Applause)**

Madam President, we are not afraid to send our citizens across the globe to study. We are not afraid to invest heavily. We are not afraid to take on EC$700,000 to send one individual to SGU to learn medicine, Madam President. We will not do that. We are not afraid to do that. We will invest in them even though we run the risk, some people are frightened, because they run the risk that when you educate people, the people start to see for themselves, they start to analyse for themselves, they can make independent decision, and they are frightened that when you are educated you become a little liberated and you can make independent decision. We are not afraid of the independent decision because our performance in this Administration, Madam President, is in the interest of the Grenadian people, and educated men can see the right and know exactly what to do when the election comes. We are not afraid of that. **(Applause)**

We are not afraid, Madam President, to deal with Project 500, and as I look in our party's manifesto, it's a line. I read "An NDC-led government will partner with the private sector to launch our first style home owner programme. Our goal is to construct 500-Grenadian style homes for sale to lower and middle-income wage earners and our youth". What's wrong with that? Housing is a serious problem, and it's not a problem that we construct. It's a problem that has been around for different decades, and people are afraid to tackle it because they do not want to move out of the box.

Within the box, what has been going on, Madam President, two windows, two doors, a couple of sheets of ply, a couple of sheets of galvanised, and every time the election comes, they speed up that process. Some people who are in need, Madam

President, still have a lot of these materials under their house because they cannot find labour.

The difference is that we are not giving them two windows, two doors, two sheets of ply, and sheets of galvanised metal. Madam President, circumstances may dictate whether the person needs a door or a window and if that will give them a complete, well-deserved, reasonable dwelling space, no problem with that. **(Applause)**

But this Administration, Madam President, we are not frightened to build a complete home for an individual and give them a decent toilet and move them away from a pit latrine. **(Applause)** We are going to take the bull by its horns and make sure that whatever housing assistance we give an individual turns out to be a perfect home they can afford, and that is what we mean when we say we are moving out of the box.

Madam President, the Chinese houses, we must acknowledge, and we must be truthful. I heard Senator André Lewis made the point, but we must be honest with ourselves. Yes, we are grateful for the houses from the Chinese, but Madam President, when we got the house, it was a shell, and we believe that our people deserve much more than that. **(Applause)** We took the resources of our country and we retrofitted the facilities, kitchen, closets, and toilets, properly partitioned. What's wrong with that? Our people deserve better. They deserve to have just like us what we enjoy. They deserve to enjoy it too, and therefore we make no apology for improving and building, and what the Chinese give us, so that our Grenadian citizens can have a decent home.

Madam President, we are not afraid to empower people. We are not frightened of them being in a position to make independent decisions. Madam President, we will move forward without anybody getting left behind.

Madam President, on the issue of Carriacou and Petite Martinique. First of all, I want to start off by informing this House that the matter of the five that was raised by Senator André has been resolved, once and for all. **(Applause)** I want to hear... And this is about the third time I have heard it in this Parliament... This House, Madam President.

But, Madam President, if I were not in Carriacou for carnival, I would have really and truly believed the story that I heard from Senator Cox because he is my very good

friend and I really enjoy being in the House with Senator Cox, genuinely. Whenever I meet him outside of Parliament, we do have a good time. But, Madam President, sometimes you have to put politics aside, and Senator Cox will definitely be remembered for his love for his country, for his island. He will be remembered for seeking the interests of the citizens of Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

But, Madam President, made the statement that houses are under tarpaulins in Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and to ignore the point that houses have been covered, I want to remind this Honourable House that there are still Government buildings without even tarpaulins in Grenada from Ivan. **(Applause)** There are Government buildings that have not even been looked at, Madam President. My experience the two days after Hurricane Beryl, when I went to Carriacou, and we braced the harbour, I'm not ashamed to say, tears filled my eyes. When I approached the MP before he could have stretched his hand and I could have stretched mine, I saw a big man cry. I didn't meet him in his home; he was on the ground.

As a matter of fact, the night the hurricane came, it did not take him to his house; it took him to the shelter with the people. And therefore, I want us to recognise that, despite what one may think of an individual, the role that MP Tevin Andrew played during that very difficult moment cannot go unnoticed, Madam President. **(Applause)** And to come here and not even mention or give credit to the MP and the Government for really taking charge of Hurricane Beryl, long before and long after the hurricane came to Grenada.

We saw the commander-in-chief take charge, and therefore, Madam President, I want to commend, let it be placed on record, the role that MP Tevin Andrew played in bringing hope to the people in those difficult moments, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President, sometimes we need to take things in context, and if you don't put it in context, sometimes you could be very misleading, and context is key. Madam President, going back to my visit to Carriacou for carnival, I didn't hear anything mentioned about Carriacou Carnival. I mean, personally, if I do advise Carriacou for carnival 2025, I would say simmer down, but the good folks said, "No, we are going to

have our carnival". It was not at the level they would have liked it but, Madam President, the people wanted to let go, and that is what happened in Jouvert morning. The crowd was a massive crowd, Madam President. People came out. They enjoy themselves. And I will tell you, based on circumstances, it was a good carnival for 2025 in Carriacou. **(Applause)** And I think you must not trivialise that.

Madam President, the situation in Carriacou in regards to Paradise Beach, one of the world, I mean first-class beaches in the Caribbean, from where it was after Beryl to where it is now, chalk and cheese; a job well down by all volunteers who left Grenada and went up to Carriacou and the people in Carriacou they came together and make sure that was properly done.

Madam President, the cleanup campaign in Carriacou has been tremendous. I mean, I don't know how many people went up there a couple of days after Beryl and who went up recently. People are happy to see what is going on in Carriacou. This Administration, this Government, together with the Parliamentary Representative, have done a fantastic job in restoring cleanliness in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. **(Applause)** We may not build all the homes, but it's going to take time.

We cannot ignore the fact that after a couple of months, all the schools were up and running, Madam President, and the Minister for Education is right here. Business places are up and running, guest home season hotels are up and running, there's a life in Carriacou, Madam President, and we must not use the opportunity to let the public imagine or contemplate that we are not, as a Government, doing anything to advance Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Madam President, I heard my good friend, Senator Dwight Horsford. Madam President, I want to advise that we have some serious dialogue with the people who just step in and step out here, listen to themselves and then go. We have to address that. This is a serious institution. **(Applause)**

As a matter of fact, it's not "free" anymore. We pay people to come here. I reached here before nine this morning. Last Monday, I got here 45 minutes before, and I was the

last to leave. I did the same thing today because I believe the state is taking care of us to do the work, and we must do it efficiently and effectively. **(Applause)**

And as I listened to him analyse his budget, well, I say his budget because really and truly, the analysis that was given, I don't know where it came from. I mean, I want to place on record with due respect to everybody, despite how many think of the World Bank and the IMF, we have been dealing with them, and I believe there are many more authoritative figures and this subject matter than anybody else for this situation. **(Applause)** I believe, and therefore, I will quote from them... I will quote from them first, before quoting from anybody else. According to the World Bank, in 2024, the GDP grew by 3.7%. It is anticipated that in 2025 it will go by 4.1%. These are the figures I will run with, and I think if that happens, based on circumstances, we are doing darn well. I withdraw, Madam President. **(Laughter)** I withdraw, Madam President. **(Inaudible comment by Madam President)** Thank you very much, Madam President. Please guide me accordingly so I will not go wrong. Madam President, we are doing well.

Madam President, I remember there was some talk about making Grenada ungovernable. Well, you could only make Grenada ungovernable if you were always in the driver's seat. If anybody has the idea that when they're living, they're going to do whatever they think will make it ungovernable, they are making a fundamental mistake. This Administration, Madam President, will govern with new ideas. If anyone believes that we must depend on what they left behind to survive and get oxygen, they are making a fundamental mistake.

In 2022, the National Democratic Congress listened to the cry of the people, and you know what they said to us? They want new faces. They want young blood. They want new ideas. They want innovation. We listened and we transformed our party, so don't believe that we're going to meet the same, and don't change it, we're going to change it, Madam President. **(Applause)**

We are not only a new Government, we have new ideas new initiatives, new programmes and most of all we have new and genuine phrase through the world I repeat we have new and genuine friends throughout the world. I repeat, we have new and

genuine friends throughout the world, Madam President. **(Applause)** No con men aren't coming here and bamboozling us. **(Applause)** No, Madam President.

Hence, the reason why we are talking about Project 500, and some people don't like to hear it. Hence, the reason why we can talk about pension and gratuity. If anybody wants to make it ungovernable for us not to pay that, we will find ways and means of finding EC$75 million and put it in the hands of public servants. **(Applause)**

Madam President, we find ways and means to establish the contributory pension. It is here and you workers accepted. Despite what people have said about it, we are moving on. We are moving forward, and hence the reason why, Madam President, we're going to talk about Project Polaris, we are not afraid. Hence, the reason why we're going to talk about the National Health Insurance, and we're going to bring it. Hence, the reason why, Madam President, we have an incentive package for the medical professionals. Ungovernable, and we are doing all these things? Well, they can't tie us down, and they can hold us. **(Applause)**

Hence, the reason why, Madam President, the upgrading of the police officers will take place. They could say what they want. We're going to see a brand new police headquarters on the Carenage, Madam President. We're going to increase scholarships and education programmes. Our pilot school bus project is on stream. Free tuition for TAMCC and NEWLO. Free school lunches and I can go on and on, Madam President, but I know time is against us.

Madam President, all systems, whatever infrastructure that were deliberately installed to fail the incoming administration have failed, and they will fail, Madam President. **(Applause)** This administration is moving forward with assistance locally, regionally and internationally.

Madam President, in concluding, let me say that as you bring this 2025 Budget debate to a close, on behalf of the Government, I stand before this Honourable House with a deep sense of responsibility, optimism, and unwavering commitment to the people of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique.

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Madam President, this budget is not just about numbers and allocations. It is about the lives we are improving, the opportunities we are creating, and the future we are building together. Madam President, we have done very well as a Government, and I feel confident to take the liberty of saying that we are successfully persuading and convincing others that we are on the right track. **(Applause)**

Our economic policies and programme, Madam President, are indeed transforming our beautiful country. What is happening in Grenada today is attracting regional and international attention.

I say what is happening in Grenada today, Madam President, is attracting regional and international attention. Madam President, the people living in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and our brothers and sisters in the diaspora are quite satisfied and understanding. They are quite satisfied and understanding, and I'm using those words because you know why? I grew up in a community where your plate was full today and half full the day before, and sometimes empty. I never got angry at my parents because I understand when you have and when you don't have, and the ordinary Grenadian is quite satisfied and understanding. They know we can do more, and we have to do more, but they will work with us until we reach the level where all can prosper. That is where the direction we are going, Madam President.

Madam President, many businesses in the business community today are enjoying reasonable turnovers despite external shocks and internal challenges. I listened to the Senator from the Business Community yesterday, that's why I could make such a statement. Madam President, the Agriculture and Fishing sectors have been well taken care of, and their assistance continues to flow with momentum and alacrity. Knock the table for that Senator. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)**

The creative industry, Madam President, has finally emerged under the Dickon-led administration, and it is bubbling with a sense of purpose, with a distinct direction in terms of where we should go, Madam President. We just brought this programme in, and we are making high marks with it. Madam President, the hotelier and other stakeholders in the tourism industry are now enjoying the glorious day, prior to COVID-19

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Madam President, the construction sector is now crying out for materials and labour. The sector is definitely moving at an alarming speed that the hardware and labour market cannot keep up with. I am speaking the truth? I'm not hearing anything that will indicate otherwise. Madam President, if this is not progress with the Congress, then what is? May God bless the progress with the Congress.

Our teachers and academic institutions are working in unison. The students are enjoying free lunches, the evolution of school fees, improved teaching environments, and quite a lot of schools under construction, Madam President, at this point in time, as I speak, and many of them will commence in a few months. Our teachers are more relaxed than they have ever been in their entire careers. **(Applause)** Salaries deduction was paid, pension and gratuity paid, and pension and gratuity are now guaranteed for all public servants through the contributory pension scheme, Madam President.

Our medical professionals are working with the Government to create an atmosphere that is second to none in the OECS and wider Caribbean, and while we are working on Project Polaris, our medical professionals are enjoying the incentive packages. Madam President, I can go on and on again.

But, Madam President, from our own analysis, we have convinced and persuaded the vast majority of Grenadians, especially supporters of the other political party in Grenada, not through transaction, but by our works, and we shall be judged. The only small bunch of people that we have difficulties in convincing, Madam President, is the hierarchy of the New National Party, but we'll get there, we'll get there at some point in time.

Madam President, over the past year, we have navigated global and domestic challenges with resilience. Despite external economic uncertainties and climate vulnerabilities, Grenada remain steadfast in the pursuit of sustainable development, financial stability and social progress. The foundation we have laid through strategic investments, prudent fiscal management, and inclusive policies will set the stage for a stronger and more prosperous nation.

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Madam President, our Government remains committed to responsible fiscal management, ensuring that every dollar spent is an investment in our people. By maintaining a disciplined approach to public finances, we are strengthening our economic resilience, allowing us to expand critical social programmes, invest in infrastructure, and support local businesses.

Madam President, economic growth is not just an abstract goal. It is a necessity for creating jobs, increasing incomes, and improving livelihoods. There is a reason why, Madam President, this Administration is not hesitating to give annual salary increases because we have confidence that our economic policies encourage economic growth.

Our focus and diversification of key sectors, such as Agriculture, Tourism, the blue economy, Renewable Energy and Digital Innovation, will unlock our economic opportunities and strengthen our global competitiveness. Madam President, through public-private partnership and targeted investment, we will continue to foster an environment that supports entrepreneurship and attract responsible investors who share our vision for sustainable development. We are not just taking short-term gains. We are laying the foundation for a robust economy that benefits every citizen of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Madam President, beyond economic growth, we recognise our greatest assets are our people. Our policies and programmes are designed to uplift every Grenadian, ensuring that no one is left behind.

This budget, Madame President, reflects our commitment to education, health care, social welfare and community development by strengthening our education system, expanding skills training and promoting innovations. We are equipping our youth with the tools to thrive in an ever-changing world. We are also prioritising healthcare reform to improve access to quality medical services, enhance hospital facilities, and provide greater support for medical professionals.

Madam President, our investment in affordable housing, public safety, and poverty reduction programmes will further enhance the quality of life for citizens. A society's true progress is measured not just by its economic indicators but by the well-being of its

people. Madam President, that is why we remain dedicated to policies that empower the vulnerable, protect the elderly and create pathways for our Grenadians to achieve their full potential.

Madam President, the success of this budget, and more importantly, the success of our nation, does not rest solely on the shoulders of the Government; it requires a collective effort of every Grenadian, business community, civil society, public servants, entrepreneurs, farmers, students and, very importantly, our brothers and sisters in the diaspora.

Let this Budget, Madam President, serve as a call to action. Let us put aside differences and work together for the common good. Let us embrace the spirit of resilience and determination that has always defined us as a people. We are stronger when we work as one, when we listen to each other, and when we commit ourselves to the shared vision of a prosperous Grenada.

In closing, Madam President, let us reaffirm our dedication to a nation where every citizen has the opportunity to strive, where innovation and creativity drive our progress, and social and economic justice remain at the heart of our policies. Madam President, as we move forward in 2025 and beyond, let us do so with confidence, purpose and unity. Together, we will build a Grenada that is more resilient, more dynamic and more inclusive and a nation that not only would stand challenges but emerges stronger from them.

Madam President, may God bless our progress with the Congress. We will continue to rise as one people, one nation, one destiny, one future. It's a blessing. I thank you very much. May god bless you. **(Applause)**

Madam President: I thank you, Senator Adrian Thomas, for your closing statements on the debate for the Motion on the table. Now that the debate has closed, I will entertain the Motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion approved.

Deputy Clerk: Item 15 – Bills.

Clerk: Message from the House of Representatives to the President and other Members of the Senate. Madam President, and other Members of the Senate, the House of Representatives at its Sitting on Tuesday 11th February 2025, concurred with the amendments made by the Senate at the Sitting on Tuesday 4th February 2025, to the Bills for Acts shortly entitled, Water Resources Management and Regulation Bill, 2025; National Water and Sewerage (Amendment) Bill, 2025; and Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2025.

Madam President: Thank you, Clerk. Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, the Senate concurs and accepts those Amendments.

Madam President: I thank you. Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg for the first reading of a Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Appropriation Bill, 2025.

Clerk: A Bill seeks to make provisions for the appropriation of a sum not exceeding One Billion, Nine Hundred and Twelve Million, Eight Hundred and Seventy-Two Thousand, and Fourteen Eastern Caribbean Dollars (EC$1,912,872,014) to the service of the State of Grenada for the period January 1 to December 31, 2025, shortly entitled, Appropriation 2025 Bill, 2025.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg to move that the relevant Standing Orders of the Senate be suspended to enable the Bill to be taken through all the stages at this Sitting.

(Senator the Honourable Adrian Thomas and the Clerk discussed privately)

Question put and agreed to.
Relevant standing order suspended.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg to move the second reading of the Bill and advise that I have the Speaker's Certificate to proceed.

Question proposed.

Madam President: Is there a request for the floor? Senator St. Clair.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: Madam President, I wish to just make some comments, please, on the Schedule in particular. Notwithstanding the various presentations on the Motion itself, I want, for the record, notwithstanding the issue of alacrity which has different intensities, we want to make a special appeal in three specific areas regarding the Schedule which I spoke on before, but I want to deal specifically with the numbers in the table.

So, for example, we spoke of some direct support in the issue of animal feed, such that we could make the price of local poultry more affordable. In fact, as I spoke on the reports in the medium-term review and focus from the Ministry of Finance, that was an area that was specifically highlighted to reduce our whole cost of import, which is almost over EC$50 million for poultry. It's sad when we have a situation like that and we seem

to have our hands tied behind our backs. I wouldn't say that we are sleeping because we are fully aware, and we are eating chicken, chicken eating. If the chicken wasn't eating, I would say we are all sleeping. We are eating chicken. The question is if we cannot address it legislatively, as my good friend, the Leader of Government's Business said, "We can't afford for the grass to continue to grow", and sooner or later, I wouldn't say horses, but the people of this nation would be having a very expensive source of protein. Eventually, my good friend in Labour will start crying because the cost of living will start rising, and he will want more money for his workers.

I believe, when I do the maths at EC$50 million, and intervention as a first start of EC$2.5 million to intervene to reduce the cost of our poultry, and this can reduce the finished product to our consumers by the commercial producers of poultry, not the backyard person with two chickens in a room, the commercial persons through arrangement with our good friends in a private sector who knows how to manage things and establish connections and knowing when things going to happen and when the market is going to be and also with our good friends in the tourism sector that would know well we don't need to import eggs and all of those things because we can get it affordable. I think that we can measure this day and see how that EC$2.5 million specifically for feed intervention can help us.

So this is something I want us to look at to increase the agriculture budget. I know my good friend, the Leader of the Government's Business, said we can swing money around. My good friend, the Minister for Education, said the budget is a guide. And so if it's a guide and if you can swing things around, I know that there are opportunities, as you say, Madam President, for partnership and finding some solution to this burning matter. Something could be done. I don't think we will come back here next year and see a similar report from the Ministry of Finance, and that.

The other area also in Agriculture, and it doesn't matter if we put it on Agriculture or whether we put it under Infrastructure. It is the issue of the farm roads. I spoke specifically that we had EC$1 million in 2024 allocated after spending only EC$300, and something thousand. Of course, when I go home and look at the infrastructure budget,

there was also some way in the region of EC$7 million for farm roads.

Farm roads, Madam President, generally are unpaved, dirty roads with easy access to farms. It's not what they call feeder roads, which are secondary roads that make connections to main roads, and so another different type of road. And so we believe that if we had EC$7 million, and we spent EC$2 million, and we had EC$1 million, and we spent EC$300 thousand or more, allocating EC$2 million and targeting... We had 500 houses, one scholarship per house for new persons who had scholarships. If we do at least two roads per constituency out of this EC$2 million farm road, I think this is also a new target, let them be transformational and give people hope in this country.

I want to go further. So in that regard, we are speaking about an EC$4.5 million increase, guide, reallocation to address some key factors in agriculture, one for the feed for animals and protein, two for access to our farm, such that we can ensure food security for this place.

The last intervention, Madam President, well, there are two more. The next major one has to do with the support for the export of fish and fresh produce. In fact, that was one of the targets in the budget of increasing fish exports, but I know that fish exports, our major challenge, has to do with shipping, which is a big issue, airlift out of this country. Our fish… The value of our fish and...

The interesting thing, Madam President, two of our major fresh fish and soursop have to be fresh. Fresh soursop. We are the only country in the world that could ship fresh soursop to the US, not frozen, not pulped, because you will get competition and in terms of fish, it has to be fresh, not frozen, and this is for the education of the public. So the fresher you keep it, it arrives better and you get more value for your money.

And so investing EC$2 million... It's not that you going and spend EC$2 million to buy a plane or something like that but it is used as some sort of support in the cases, for example, where you have high fish time or high soursop time, how can we support some charters or some other things because while we boast about tourism and all the persons coming on the airlines, these airlines 90% of them don't take freight. They take passenger load, and that is their priority; the cargo is secondary. And whilst yes, we

have Amerijet for example, sometimes when you need it, it is challenging, and so farmers lose a lot of money, both the fisherfolk... Sometimes you see fish selling very cheaply, and you ask, "How come it's cheap"? Because maybe a shipment didn't go.

We may say, "Let's do agro-processing". Agro-processing should not be a strategy for failure; it should be a strategy for growth, and that's a different discussion to go into agro-processing. It means that we can double our whole production if we want to do that.

So I specifically look at this to assist the fisher and the soursop folks, EC$2 million, which can go either under Agriculture, or under Aviation, wherever it wants to be appropriated. We believe that's another addition we can look at.

And the last one, which shouldn't cost more than EC$500, and I couldn't find the notes of that question, the whole issue of the membership in the World Meteorological Organisation. We seem to be sleeping on this one because every day we speak about climate change and climate resilience and so on, and to improve the capacity of our international airport, infrastructure in terms of air traffic control. You know, you need to understand the weather for air traffic control. We don't want planes to be crashing into one another because we don't know what the weather is, and all of those things fit in one, and so this is a special appeal that we should look at. I know you may not need a lot of money for this to support membership in the World Meteorological Organisation. These are my four specific matters I want to share with the "Government Side" to not lose sight of in this deliberation. I thank you.

Madam President: I thank you, Senator St. Clair. Any other input proposed or requested? Hearing none.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled Appropriation 2025 Bill, 2025.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg to move the third reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Appropriation 2025 Bill, 2025.

Madam President: Thank you, Clerk. Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg to introduce for first reading of a Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, Budget and New Hospital Project Loan Authorisation Bill, 2025.

Clerk: A Bill which seeks to authorise the Minister for Finance to borrow specified amounts of money from various sources to finance the 2025 Budget and to finance the new Hospital Project with teaching facilities, shortly entitled, 2025 Budget and New Hospital Project Loan Authorisation Bill, 2025.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg to move that the relevant Standing Order of the Senate be suspended to enable the Bill to be taken through all its stages at this Sitting.

Question put and agreed to.

Relevant Standing Order suspended.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg to move the second reading of the Bill and advise that I have the Speaker's Certificate to proceed.

Question proposed.

Madam President: Honourable Norland Cox.

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, it is customary for Government to borrow for financing purposes for the budget, and we are quite aware of such. While we recognise that this is probably the largest Budget Loan, I think, in recent times, we, as a country, have decided to subject ourselves to, I think, just to reiterate our concerns in terms of the debt, and concerns in terms of the projections and the directions of where the debt is going.

While we are working with our international partners, as I say, we as a country need to ensure our debt-to-GDP ratio continues to go down to a manageable amount, Madam President. It is clear that anytime we engage in borrowing, we are basically exposing ourselves to the potential risk of moving that figure upwards. But I wanted to, Madam President, kind of get some clarity, and I am just assuming, and I am not sure if the mover of the Bill can bring some clarity to me.

While we have the loan for the budget, we also have a separate loan for the Hospital Project. I am assuming that EC$20 million will not be sufficient to complete the project. As such, we wanted to find out how this loan is going to be treated going forward. If more is going to be added annually going forward. If every budget going forward, we expect to see more money being borrowed toward the Hospital Project. So I wanted some clarity on that because I don't believe EC$20 million would be sufficient to complete this project, given the magnitude of what is expected to be the final product for this project. So I just raised some concerns with that because it seems to be a continuous loan

commitment.

I know there may be other sources of financing, so maybe the Member can bring some information if he does have it, and can speak to it, or maybe, Madam President, at another time. I don't believe the conversation and discussion on this important project for the country will die in just two days of deliberation, but the main concern that we have, Madam President, centres around the size of what we are borrowing, and I believe it warrants us to pay some attention.

I say this on the backdrop that our economic growth, our GDP growth, is not as significant as in line with our borrowing. Because the Member did say, Madam President, based on IMF's feedback, we are expected to grow by four. 1% for 2025. However, Madam President, I mean that is a small point four percentage variance because if you're moving from three. Seven in 2024 to just four. One in 2025, which means that the variance is less than a percentage growth. It is not even 0.5 of a percentage, so it's a very small growth. So we have to be careful, and I agree with my brother in terms of fiscal measures, being fiscally prudent, because as a country we do not want to go back to a situation where we have to put ourselves through harsh measures for us to get our head out of the water.

So I just caution the Government in terms of borrowing, and maybe they can look to new and innovative ways to raise financing other than borrowing to meet and to help reduce some of this debt commitment that they are seeking to achieve.

As I said, what is before here doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to borrow the whole amount, but they have included the whole amount in what is required, and there is a possibility that it might be less, and maybe there is a possibility it might be more, Madam President.

So I caution us, and if some clarity can be brought as to why the separation of the two loans, and if the loan for the hospital, which I believe is going to be continuous, if he can give some information on that. Thank you very much, Madam President.

Madam President: Thank you for your intervention, Senator Cox. Senator Adrian

Thomas. Before you, it's Senator André Lewis. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** I take it that Senator Lewis is asking a question, so when Senator Thomas speaks, he will respond to both.

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Yes.

Madam President: I take it... So please go ahead. You go ahead.

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Thank you, Madam President. Under this Bill, if my memory serves me right, and I stand to be corrected. Under the budget, the amount that was shown for the hospital, I think, was EC$23 point something million? **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Yes. Therefore, help me understand why the loan under "Authority to Raise"... 21B of the Bill before us. "We are seeking to raise EC$405 million for the purpose of financing the new Hospital Project with teaching facilities".

In other words, 20 by 10 is 200. So 20 by 20 is about 400. Right? Therefore, this means that this is roughly close to 20 times what we are seeing in the budget. In relation to… What's the page again? What I recall seeing in the budget, and if I am wrong, you can correct me… For the Hospital under Vote 50. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** EC$23 point something million under the Estimates. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Page 851… what my recollection is, is EC$23 point something million dollars for the new hospital, yes, but what you are asking here… The proposed loan amount is EC$405 million. I am not even addressing where at the bottom, where we don't really have any idea of terms and conditions, interest, because that could also be a factor for us.

I really want to again appeal, Madam President, through you. I know Senator Cox raised it further to what I've raised, but I want to repeat it again. We are always the ones carrying the sacrifices and belt-tightening. I have lived through a number of those. I've lived through 2014, 2016, and into 2017. I have lived through the era of the Honourable

George Brizan. Right. I know what it is. I know we are the ones. So we need assistance here because you are asking us to approve EC$405 million, but what I saw in the Budget Document roughly spoke about EC$23 point something million, unless I am missing something. How do the two square up?

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Lewis. Senator St. Clair.

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Madam President.

Madam President: Senator Joseph.

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Yes, if I may indicate my support of the Motion before the House for the passage of the Loan Authorisation 2025 Budget and New Hospital Loan Authorisation Bill. I think we might be missing the first part, the "budget" and "loan authorisation". To answer the question, you would see section 2 (1)(a) speak to the Minister for Finance being authorised to raise a loan in the amount of EC$405 million for the purpose of financing the new Hospital Project, and the second part is the purpose of financing the 2025 Budget.

So, it's the two figures, but for two specific purposes. If you look at the Schedule to the Act, it addresses the type of borrowing, including loans, bonds, promissory notes, and other financial instruments, purpose, to finance the 2025 Budget and the new teaching hospital facilities. If you compute the two, you would get the total indicated that is needed in the budget for capital expenditure, that's how I understand it, and then, of course, there is the schedule of the lenders… Sorry. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** That's what I've just done.

Madam President: What's your question, Senator?

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: (Inaudible comment by a Senator)

Yes. Isn't the total 8? Yes. So that's what I've just done.

Madam President: Senator André Lewis… Senator St. Clair

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: So, Madam President…

Madam President: Hold a minute. Are you completed?

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Yes, Madam President.

Madam President: You're finished? Thank you very much. Senator St. Clair.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: Thank you, Madam President. I think we... One shot at this. Thank you, Madam President. My concern and thought process, having gone through this request, is that it is a normal request, as Senator Cox said. I want to build a house. I have EC$200,000. It's an EC$1,000,000 house, so I need $800,000 to finish building the house. Normally, most of the time we get this, and maybe I could be wrong, but from my short time, most of the authorisation is basically to finance the Budget, which is a figure that comes in without any specific breakdown, as this significant breakdown. It might be $800,000, but in my case, because I want to build this house for $1,000,000, so maybe I need to do some plumbing, I need to put the roof, I need some yard work, and you could break it down to get this EC$800,000.

In this specific case, the issue that is before us is that we are speaking of a total amount of EC$825 million. Okay. That's fine. Then we say, well, this is to break down into two components. So there is a justification or explanation saying look, it gives you more details. $405,000, that's my interpretation as I try to present my contribution. EC$405 million of this EC$800 and something million will be for the hospital, so don't worry, Senator Lewis and the others are to finance the Budget, that's what it says.

So I've been kind of scratching my head and going back to the whole issue of a Budget is a guide as to whether or not all these monies that would be in the Government coffers, the Budget of spending will be the "budget" of EC$420 million because that is the one that says budget. So I would add this to the whole thing to make sure that this EC$1.9 million balances out, and then we say another EC$200 million or something would come out of the Consolidated Fund, that's what I interpret.

Now, the question in my head is, this EC$405 million is this part of the Budget or is it part of the hospital? Because it didn't say "budget". So I think the operative word is that the EC$405 million is for the hospital, but it is not for the budget because the EC$420 million is for the budget.

So I think it could be maybe a drafting issue. So it's the budget for the hospital, and then there is the regular budget. That is what I think because you cannot have approved something for the hospital, it is to approve for the budget, so is it part of the budget? I think it is a nomenclature issue. It's a nomenclature. I then ask the next question, Madam President, to all of this, and this is one part of my query, and it's interesting that they raise it without even discussing, maybe this side belongs to one type of language. You know it has Spanish, English…

The other part of it had to do with the whole issue of when you go and look at the capital budget of the hospital, Vote 50, which speaks about... And you can find out on page 851. It speaks about EC$23,575,000. That is the capital budget for Project Polaris in 2025.

Interesting to note, Madam President, for me, is that in 2026 and 2027, which is spoken about in the budget, is 0 and 0. However, interestingly, if you go down one line further in that same Schedule on the same page 851, it speaks about, I think, the upgrade of General Hospital, and there were numbers for 2025, 2026 and 2027. So I feel good that there is going to be continual work to at least keep the local hospital going whilst Project Polaris comes on.

2025 is this EC$23 something million, 2026 nothing, 2027 nothing, but I know the hospital in no way, unless it is a paper design, is going to happen in 2025. The design,

the authorisation, all of those things, we know, getting material here would not happen in 2025. So I found it interesting at why no money was allocated like other items in the budget for the subsequent year.

So, for example, you may say well I am getting EC$450 million loan so I expect maybe in 2026 maybe it would go up because work may start so it may go up to EC$200 million, the other one may be EC$300 million because you working, you building up things and so the question arise for me, these EC$23 million is it from the local funds and it has nothing to do with that loan that we are going to get? So it's placed there still as a holding money? That is one thought, I don't know and then if it's not and its coming out of this loan that they will get, the question is then, in primary school they said if you have five and you take away two, you leave with three then where are we putting the remains? Are we going to spread it to the other years and then the other years showing zero and that is why yesterday I said some areas I think could be an error in how this new system is recording things because if you have EC$405 million and you use EC$23 million and you remained with this EC$300 million and something million then how do you spread it in the end.

I think the complication mentally is where this EC$405 million is set up in the capital budget document. So does it mean that it wasn't included, and so we need to include it and increase the final Budget to maybe EC$2 billion? And if this is what needs to happen, then the Ministry of Finance need to advise on that because we could be agreeing to approve this EC$405 million that is not adding up in the calculation. If you go back to that Schedule, Madam President, that we just debated a while ago in the Appropriation Bill, the sums of all the totals are there. Whatever we are borrowing is supposed to add to all of these figures, which is going to give us this EC$1.9 million.

For example, I made a special request for an additional $ 2. 5 million for poultry, EC$2 million for farm roads, and EC$2 million to deal with the airlift, totalling EC$6.5 million. So I ask, can we increase the overall Budget to add this money?

The question could be asked of me, Senator St. Clair, so where are we getting this money? From the Consolidated Fund or from a loan? And then you say, okay, we

need to increase the loan amount by EC$6.5 million because we didn't cater for that, it's fine, but it must add back to give us the bottom line.

So I think the proof of the pudding is the EC$405 million in the details, that's adding up to this EC$1.9 million. I don't know if you need to take a recess to work out the math for that **(laughter)**, Madam President, because this could be a malfeasance. I rest my case.

Madam President: Any other contributions?

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you very much…

Madam President: Wait a minute, please, thank you. Senator Thomas, are you going to address the questions raised? **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Pardon… **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** I didn't hear you.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: I said I am closing the debate.

Madam President: Yes, it's your responsibility.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, sometimes I am frightened that we confuse ourselves by overthinking, and maybe ultimately we may confuse the public and over-speculate too much. Madam President, we are dealing with two different matters here. We spent two days in this House discussing the 2025 Budget. There is no way this hospital could be built by the 31st of December, 2025; that's impractical, and it can't happen. So I don't know why we are making these assumptions that the loans will all be in the 2025 Budget. This Bill, Madam President, is very clear, 2025 Budget and New Hospital Project Loan Authorisation. We have two sections, section 1 and section 2 here, Madam President. This is so clear, Madam President. On page 17 in the Budget Speech delivered here in

this House a couple of weeks ago, there is nothing indicating that the EC$23. 6 million would be coming out from this loan. And we specifically spelt out that the turning of the sod, ground breaking on the Hope Vale site, we are looking at the first half of 2026.

Madam President: So let me ask you, the EC$405 million loan is not to be computed within the 2025 Budget.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I am not seeing anything indicating that. I mean, I am not the best in English, per se. I wasn't born in England, but the language here specifically states that we are dealing with a 2025 Budget and the New Hospital Project Loan authorisation Bill. It is a Bill we are dealing with here, Madam President. So why are people worrying about where all this money would be chucked into the Budget and added up to EC$1.9 billion… What's that?
So, Madam President, I want to use this opportunity to thank everybody for their contribution on this very important matter, and I now commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, 2025 Budget and New Hospital Project Loan Authorisation Bill, 2025.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg to move the third reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill read a third time and passed.

Clerk: A Bill for an Act, shortly entitled, 2025 Budget and New Hospital Project Loan Authorisation Bill, 2025.

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Deputy Clerk: Item 16 – Public Business.
Item 17 – Request for leave to move the adjournment of the House on matters of urgent public importance.

Madam President: Senator Claudette Joseph.

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Madam President… **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** You have to move…

Madam President: Leader of Government's Business.

Sen. the Hon. Adrian Thomas: Madam President, I beg to move the adjournment of this House, *sine die*.

Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph: Madam President, I just want to raise one matter, perhaps two, that were mentioned not relating to the budget per se, but mentioned by the Senator representing Labour, and that has to do with the matter he referred to as the Carriacou Five. I am not sure if the Senator is aware, so I would share with this Honourable House that the matter is now resolved. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** The result is that the parties agreed that compensation would be paid to the workers. It was ultimately an amicable resolution of the matter. Right. So it is now resolved, and the relevant ministry agrees that the workers should be compensated. So I thought I would update the House, this being a matter of interest.

Adjournment

Madam President, I would also like to take a moment to recall, or remember and ask the Almighty to embrace the soul of the young lady who died at Darbeau on Tuesday. I extend sincerest condolences to her mom, her loved ones, and the community. She was fondly regarded in the neighbourhood, so it is indeed a sad time. I was hoping to make it to the family today, but Senator St. Clair detained me. **(Laughter)**

So, Madam President, it underscores the need for us to place emphasis on issues relating to mental health and highlight the wisdom in having a ministry dedicated to the issue. We hope to continue to support the Minister responsible for Mental Health and her staff as we work to serve and deliver for the people in this area, that is, I would say, new and hitherto taboo, so that it will take a while for it to become the norm for persons to be open about issues relating to mental health.

But I think the spotlight on mental health by setting up the ministry and speaking more and more openly about it, having policies and hopefully soon laws relating to this issue, will help our people, help the public to be more comfortable and open in addressing the issues and speaking up when they suffer from mental health, just as easily as when they suffer from diabetes or any other illness.

We don't want this subject to be taboo because we recognise a lot of our young people are suffering silently. Not just young people, but we are particularly concerned with the young, you know, and the vulnerable. So may the angels of God allow her to be entered into paradise, and may her soul rest in peace.

Madam President: Amen. Thank you, Senator Joseph. Senator Francis.

Sen. the Hon. Seville Francis: Thank you, Madam President. Before we officially leave this Honourable House, I want to raise one issue that I think is very important in this House and in the "Other Place". We come here to discuss the people's business, and I believe that when we are discussing the people's business, it should be able to reach every citizen across our tri-island state, whose issues and the Bills that we debate here affect.

And in this regard, Madam President, I noticed that when we have these sittings, we are not catering for those who communicate via the sign language; the hearing impaired, Madam President. And so it is something that I have raised outside of this House or "This Place" in the public domain, and I think it is prudent that it goes on record for something to be done in a more permanent manner to ensure that everyone's need is catered to and met when we are discussing and deliberating on the people's business.

Also, on another issue, well, not issue but point, I too want to join with Senator Joseph, and I know I did mention it previously in my presentation, but as we're on the topic of mental health and catering for everyone's need, I want to make special or say a special congratulations and thank you to the Suicide Decriminalisation Cohort. And it is a cohort that is managed and spearheaded by a group of young women. I am proud to be a part of that organisation, Madam President, and we are not just here in Grenada, but we are regional and we belong to bigger international bodies.

And so on that note, I want to make special commendation for the effort and the strides that we have been making in ensuring that, especially, the legislation surrounding suicide is updated. I know sometime last year we had a consultation with different key stakeholders here in Grenada, including Senator Thomas' ministry, Madam President, and I know that we have a lot more work to do, so I am making a clarion call for others to join in the cause to lend support in whatever way that you can. And to the cohort, I say to us, let us not become despondent. Let us not become weary, because the fight that we are fighting is for a good cause.

On that note, I also want to advance birthday wishes to myself. **(Laughter) (Applause)** Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: That last one is not allowed **(laughter)** for the reason that we should, can and will extend happy birthday wishes to you in a minute. Senator Cox, you have the floor.

Adjournment

Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox: Thank you very much, Madam President. I was just getting kind of worried about how the people's business is one of a celebratory note, but congratulations are in order.

Madam President, I just want to touch on three important matters, and just to reiterate, in terms of being satisfied. I am happy to hear that the matter with the workers in Carriacou has been resolved. And just to really inform my colleague, the Leader of the Government's Business on the "Other Side". Sometimes when I hear him speak about certain things that are not taking place, and what this Government is doing. He has to understand that Carriacou is a different place, Madam President. There is so much more I could say, and so much more will be said in due course. It just doesn't have sufficient time to really bring that information up front. A lot of scholarship? We will have enough time to talk about that, Madam President.

So I just want to say how happy I am that some resolution has been brought to that matter, and it's unfortunate that we had to go down that road, and there are things that we can avoid if we just do it the right way, and so as we say, we are happy that it is resolved.

Second matter, Madam President, is one and it has to do with the Mt. Pleasant School project. Madam President, it is a kind of aggrieved situation where the initial contractor who got the contract to repair the school had his contract terminated somewhere along the way, and another contractor was brought up from the mainland to complete the project.

Madam President, in reviewing this issue, there are a number of errors which the Ministry of Infrastructure oversaw that led to the final situation as to where we are. For example, Madam President, after the contractor signed the contract, he took a whole year before he commenced work, and you have a situation where the contractor sought additional financing, and if you seek additional financing from a financial institution, you basically wait to execute the project for a whole year, and I think Beryl came and some other issues.

And so there are a number of matters regarding how it was processed. The

Government of Grenada, of course, do have a right to an extent to terminate contracts. There are clauses for breach and whatever, but I think it is a more sensitive matter, especially given the circumstances in Carriacou post-Beryl, and actually taking employment away from somebody who is there and who has that intuition.

And the problem is, Madam President, additionally, the payment has been late. He received a letter of termination, and to date, his compensation cannot be finalised. So I believe the proper thing to do is that if you are going to advance a termination, a final invoice and everything should be treated within a timely manner to allow a clean severing.

So it's on a really, really aggrieved matter, and I really ask my good colleague, the Minister for Education, who is not directly responsible for the project, can offer some words to ensure that this matter is brought to some closure, and I just raised it.

I can speak a lot more on it in terms of details, Madam President, but in the interest of time, and I think the whole issue is something that we want to resolve. There was some degree of unfairness and maybe some error on the part of the contractor, too, and vice versa, but I think it was quite unfortunate that a contractor in Carriacou at the time was deprived of an opportunity to benefit within his purview, and a contractor had to come all the way from Grenada.

There are a number of incidents where we can speak to that, but as I said, at another time. Madam President, I just wanted to single out that matter and for the Government to do something about it to bring some finality and some closure to that issue.

Madam President, the last thing is the whole issue of Cuba. I am not too, in terms of what the whole issue is in terms of the policy and what it is towards Cuba, but Cuba has had a tough road. They've had a tough history in terms of their existence as a people, and I stand in solidarity with Cuba because of their humane existence, the way they respond to the world. They were one of the first countries to send people anywhere in the world where there are crises, and for that, we really want to recognise them for their outstanding characteristic of reaching out to different countries wherever there are crises.

They are a partner. They are a friend of this country, and whatever adversity they may be facing, whatever challenges, we stand, I personally stand in support and solidarity to ensure that they may be able to overcome this and to move forward as a nation, as a Government and as a people. So I just wanted to register my support for Cuba **(applause)** at this point in time. Thank you very much, Madam President.

Madam President: Thank you, Senator Cox, thank you very much. Senator David Andrew.

Sen. the Hon. David Andrew: Right, Madam President, with your leave, I just want to say probably three things on this Adjournment. I think one of the first is to congratulate our local soca artist Blaka Dan **(applause)** for his startling and outstanding performance in the region, having won.

I think my colleagues were talking about how much I referenced the calypsonian in my presentation, so I think I am keeping consistent and highlighting the performance of our local artist, who continues to perform well and continues to raise the cultural presence of Grenada as a Caribbean powerhouse and in the region. So congratulations to him and commendations on behalf of the Government and all of us in this Honourable House. The first.

Second, Madam President, we talked a lot about healthcare, and I didn't want to, I would not feel comfortable leaving here today and not mentioning for the average Grenadian to know that over the last few months, there has been a rigorous engagement of Mt. Sinai, which is one of the leading teaching hospitals in the United States. Apart from engaging them with a view to upgrading service for the new hospital, they have been engaged in doing gap analysis, gap assessments at the General Hospital and starting to engage hospital staff to bridge the gap in the quality of service delivery. So while persons might say not much has happened and nothing is happening, the assessment has been done, they provided significant gaps, the reports were presented, and they have been given the clearance by the Cabinet to engage staff and to engage hospital officials.

In fact, they have been working in collaboration with them, so that's an ongoing improvement, an intervention that we know will bear fruit, so that when the new hospital comes, we already have improvement in standard operating procedures at the hospital in alignment with what is internationally best practice.

So I wanted to give some degree of comfort. While we know the healthcare system is far from where we would like it to be, there are some things happening by way of improvement in the quality and standard of operating procedure in alignment with Mt. Sinai. So I wanted to say that.

The other thing I wanted to mention, Madam President, is that mention was made of sargassum and the fact that nothing was done about that or is being done about it. In fact, I think that's not accurate. In fact, in keeping with the Ministry of the Environment under Vote 8, quite a number of things were done in relation to harnessing the sargassum.

In fact, there is currently in place a sargassum valnurisation strategy. There was a Sargassum Conference, as you well know, held in Grenada, and several good things came out of that. There is a Sargassum Valorisation Task Force charged with putting all the things in place to ensure that we can get the best value out of the sargassum. There has been consultation with stakeholders, even to the point of having an expression of interest from researchers and developers in relation to sargassum. So far, we've had as many as 31 entities and research institutes responding to that expression of interest.

So to say that absolutely nothing has happened is quite unfair. The Ministry of Climate Resilience and the Environment has been working to provide meaningful solutions to the sargassum issue that are well researched and well future-driven. So I just wanted to add those on the Adjournment. Thank you, Madam President. **(Applause)**

Madam President: Senator Andrew, thank you very much. Senator André Lewis.

Adjournment

Sen. the Hon. Mondy André Lewis: Thank you very much, Madam President. This would be an interesting case study, the issue of compensation for the Carriacou Five. Hear me out, please, Madam President.

That is what employers do by frustrating workers so that the interest of going back to work... They lose that interest, and the best thing to do is to settle for pay when these people want to work. I am saying this, Madam President, through you, to the Minister for Labour, because this is the Government, and I was not just speaking about a settlement. I know eventually it may reach there because money is not coming out of our pocket, it is coming out of the state, but these five people wanted it, and they wanted to work. If it is for two and a half years, they are out of work, that's 24 plus 6 is 30; that's 30 months times their salary, which I am sure would be much more than whatever compensation they got.

That is why some unions, and in particular the Technical and Allied Workers Union, on matters of termination, like GRENLEC did with the two workers that they tried to frustrate, to get them to be frustrated, that they will take a settlement of EC$5,000 and EC$10,000 and the matter could have been resolved. So the two workers that have been sent home, ordinary working people and the company frustrate them and frustrate them and frustrate them, as the Government did with the Carriacou Five, and after being frustrated and not getting an income... You see, this is ordinary working-class things I am discussing here, colleagues through you, Madam President.

It is one thing to say, "Yes, the matter is resolved". Yes, because they have been paid off, because obviously they recognise there is no light in sight at the end of the tunnel, because the state, the employer, is big, so obviously there is a settlement. But the ideal thing that the workers wanted was to be working. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** They wanted to be working. **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)**

Madam President, and I'll tell you because from day one they didn't look for compensation, but I understand the effluxion of time. In other words, we have advised, we have done that as a trade unionist, we have done that. We have explained to workers that you have been outside there long, and the relationship you know you want to go on

with your life, you get something else to do, just take payment. But I am saying that which has brought them there that is not what they wanted in the beginning. And for the state to be, I don't want to say the word "culprit" because you might tell me that's a... Right... In this and that bordered me.

I'll tell you, with our history of struggle, I remember in the early 1990s, the first working day of 1991, which came up yesterday, with Cable and Wireless. The first working day of 1991 was a strike in Cable and Wireless. A worker was dismissed. The company, recognising that things are tight because the workers are militant, didn't want to take him back immediately. The company said, "Allow him to stay on for the next two weeks, and we will pay him". But there is a dignity of the worker. There is a dignity of the human being. And therefore we said, "No, he must come back now", and the workers were prepared to lose pay and stand up outside in solidarity with him, and they had to take him back.

We have five sisters from Carriacou, women, women who lost their jobs at the change of administration. They were not in any sensitive position, and we know that. They were not policymakers. They fought for their job. I know that. I spoke to them. They wanted to work. I saw them break down in tears. I went to Carriacou. Yes, the matter is resolved, and okay, that is the end, but I am saying there are lessons from that.

I am asking for workers to be treated with dignity. Employers and especially the state ought not to allow workers to reach a point where they feel like nothing else could be done, and let me take money and go, because what they want to do is to live a dignified life with a guaranteed income. If they do something to be dismissed, they will be dismissed.

The fact that the state paid them means that they did not qualify for dismissal because I am sure, I am absolutely certain, knowing my colleague as the Attorney General and knowing the people that lead this country, if workers deserve to be terminated, they will not be paid for their years of service. It has happened in other statutory bodies represented by the Technical and Allied Workers Union and other places. We have not been able to get compensation because the state has maintained that they

are wrong and that they needed to be dismissed.

So this is for me, when the Attorney General and Minister for Labour said, "Probably Senator Lewis did know that". What I am addressing is the issue of dignity, the issue of no victimisation, and the issue that you have struck it out.

GRENLEC has tried, you know. The worker who they sent home since last year in March, and we went out on the street despite what everybody else said, and the young sister who was only 19 years old, started to work with them since in TAMCC, and I must give credit because the Attorney General found that they were wrong, and that's a majority state-owned company. They tried to frustrate the workers, but it is a good thing they have a union that is there, and we are constantly in contact with them because they are frustrated.

The company called them in. Could you imagine a company like GRENLEC, majority state-owned, where the Government decides who the majority of people are on the board, and there must be policies to call these two workers in and offer them EC$5,000 and EC$10,000 when they want to have a job and a family? Now, if they got frustrated to the point they would have taken it, but we are constantly there with them, and I can tell you one or two of them may have given consideration to that.

So when I heard that report that there is a settlement and there is compensation, for me, yes, the matter is at rest, so the workers have gone on, but the lesson here is that, especially, the state must treat working-class people with dignity. Yes.

Look at it. Look at it. Tell me what the difference is. Frank on the beach in Grand Anse. He was wrong. He built there without permission. His place was demolished. As we speak today, a place was demolished in La Sagesse, a guy who has been fighting to take care of his family, a community brother that you know, but Rayneau in Woodford, that the Physical Development Authority has written stop notices for, and they have totally ignored them and continued the build. Nothing has taken place. They continue to build, and they continue to build.

Colleagues, if we're speaking working-class and we're calling Maurice Bishop's name and the Revolution, what are we doing? What signal are we sending? So Frank.

He spent 40-something thousand dollars, and everybody who knows him knows he has been on the beach ever since. He tries to make a hustle by renting out chairs, getting chairs and renting them out. So he was wrong, and he admitted he was wrong. He sat there, and we heard him. He sat there and he watched as his heart sank and his place was demolished, he said, "What could I do? I am wrong".

But Rayneau, whatever you call it, in Woodford... **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** But it's the environment. Yes, it's private land. I agree, but the law says that even if you're building privately, even if it's... As a matter of fact, all land belongs to the state. All land belongs to the state.

That is why in... How do you call where that hotel is down in… La Phare Bleu. How do you call down there? **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** Egmont. You remember when... Well, Cox, it was you all time. Remember when the residents there had an issue with the heavy traffic and the bridge that the men built, and the state acquired the place? Okay, because it's the state land. They can do that.

So my brother, I hear you, and I know you're genuine; you are working-class. Although it is private land, the state has control. If it's a danger to the environment and a danger to the community, the state can intervene, and even if it is private land, if the Physical Development Authority tell them to stop, until such time, they ought to stop.

So, two things, three things, four things, whatever it is, explain to me how you want ordinary working-class people to feel when our countries have been sold out over the years and prime lands have been bought by the mega millionaires et cetera, and people feel as though that our rights are taken away where we can live and enjoy ourselves, and this administration, that said that it has done so much for workers and that why I keep saying is the big ticket items that the unions have been fighting for.

And that's okay, but where you have to make a mark for yourself where you have to make a mark for yourself, to demonstrate that you are fear across the board, we say its private land and the community is complaining, the farmers are complaining, but if I build on my land that I buy or Roderick build, Senator on his land that he built, PDA will go in and stop it.

So I'm making that request on behalf of the working class. We don't want just another society, but we want a just society. You can't have it part of the way, you know. You can't have it and say, "Yes, yes, yes. Revolution or PRG". How do we deal to make the ordinary member of the public feel like they are equal to anyone else and will be treated similarly? So how does Mr. Frank feel, that he saw on beyond headlines when the leaders of the PDA admitted that the company paid no attention to them and they did nothing. It must mean that somebody above them is stopping them. It must mean that. I don't care what anybody tells me. It must mean that somebody above them is stopping them from doing their work.

In La Sagesse on the beach now, right, when two days ago or two nights ago I heard the guy speaking about how he had to take and he's fighting to take care of his family, right, and it's a board place. I sat there today, and I heard the news. I'm not sure if it is true, probably it is true, I'm wishing it is not true, that this place has been demolished. And yes, he's wrong, and in other words, because there are laws, but laws must be applied to all of us, and Madam President, through you, my brother, comrade Adrian, Senator Adrian, and I call you as the Leader of Government's Business, through you.

This is not about us. This is about us as making Grenadians feel... And we have complained that there's a change and there's a change that people are feeling as though they are distant from this country that you're not part of this, you know, Grenadians, who feel as though we are pushed out.

And then right before our very eyes, right before our very eyes, as we speak, Frank has lost 40-something thousand dollars. He has nobody to stand up with him, because he's wrong? The family in La Sagesse, the Woodford community.

And I am making an appeal to my colleagues in the Cabinet. There's a feeling that there's a certain level of arrogance that is developing. Some people have called me, and they have said that their interaction with certain ministers comes close to being disrespectful. I don't know if it is true. I have no reason to doubt the people who call me because they, yes, appear to be respectful. I don't want to make an invaluable judgment, but examine that and see how we interact with people. So that's that.

You know, the struggle for our liberation continues because there are different interests. And it is the same context I am putting the amendment to the labour code, Madam President. As I said... Because they want to create that atmosphere, because we are told by the leadership of this country, before they came into office, that they are foreign investors who want to come to Grenada, but because of the industrial issues we have and the strength of labour unions, they bypass Grenada. So these laws are designed to try to mussel us, but they shall not.

Madam President, I wish to compliment the... Before I go to the complimenting... As we speak about Blaka Dan and others and the progress they have made in terms of the art form, soca and groovy. I must pay homage to Senator Adrian and Ambassador Glen and the others, you know, who led the struggle over many years. My brother, remember that, Senator Adrian?

It is comrades like you and colleagues like you, that has stuck out, right, and therefore, the name is Finesse Augustine, who is no longer with us; may his soul rest in peace, comes to mind. Remember the days when he assisted and everything? So you are reaping the benefit of these, and therefore it speaks about eternal struggle, because you all could have gotten frustrated.

You remember there were times when the calypsonians were the Opposition to the Government, Cox and them? I mean, you will get a little blow from now on... That's what it is, and you didn't give up, so I just want you to know that.

And finally, I wish to compliment the Government on the pay and grade for the police. I meant to address that in the budget, but I wish to compliment them for finally bringing this matter hopefully to an end. But to make a request and an appeal for what I call reparative justice. This thing was supposed to have been done so long that many officers have retired and gone home and never got anything close to what they were entitled to.

And therefore, I'm making an appeal to the police and to the Government to ensure that these police officers who are no longer in the service and who ought to have been properly compensated, based on the pay and grade and when it was done, should be

given some form of compensation to reflect close as possible that which they have not received.

And at the same time, in ending... In ending, let that be the lesson for the wider public service for a pay and grade to be done to ensure that public officers are properly compensated as we have done to ourselves in the Senate and in the "Other Place" because our salaries have been adjusted, in some instances, close to 400%. In some instances, close to 400% and I say, "Yes, that's great", but we must not only look after those close, closer to us; the wider public service that serves the nation deserves a review of their pay and grade. And it's a step in the right direction. So I thank you very much, Madam President.

Madam President: I thank you, Senator Lewis. Is that a request from the floor, Senator St. Clair?

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: All right. Thank you.

Madam President: Thank you. You have the floor, sir.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: Thank you, Madam President. So, a few comments, Madam President. I want to start where Senator Lewis stopped. Well, not stopped, but he handed the baton. Sorry, Madam President.

Sergeant-at-Arms: The Deputy President in the Chair.

Sen. the Hon. Roderick St. Clair: Deputy President in the Chair. Okay. Deputy President, the issue of Crop Compensation, because, you know, whole time is a lot of compensation, compensation, but I'm not hearing about compensation with the Crop Compensation Schedule since 1995. And I want to reiterate the need for us to deal with that matter. We have been making clarion calls for this over and over. The last Schedule

was said 1995. All sorts of Bills, all sorts of increases have been taking place, and this, I would say, is the last attempt in this format to address this matter.

I listened to the Attorney General in a presentation, and I must see that I'm very impressed with the number of things that they were able to get done in the ministry. So I'm not too sure if this matter has not come to them yet to deal with, but I am appealing to her to use her good office based on the communication from here, to have such a dialogue with the Minister for Agriculture, who is the only one that can commission that Schedule to take place.

You know, I listened about minimum wage. I listened about consumer desk, I listened about reports that we have not sent to the ILO, all these great accomplishments, but the farmers cannot get more accomplishments; no achievement.

In 2025, we just spoke about the budget, how Government spending, income and revenue can be done. Similarly, the farmers want to be able to account for those things properly. The Ministry of Agriculture in the Budget Extension Office speaks about one of the key activities in 2024, which is the timely processing of Crop Compensation requests, and I am saying, well, it's easy to do quickly because it's small figures from 1995; they don't have big figures, which is supposed to be.

And so this is a special appeal to the Minister for Agriculture, Minister, Attorney General, to really do something for the farmers. We, of course, would be grateful for the income support that was provided from Beryl, but that's two different issues, two separate issues, and they should not in any way be linked to say, "Well, farmers keep all you self-quiet still all you got some money, hold on". No.

And as Senator Lewis also mentioned, which is important, the upgrade of the police in terms of the pay and grade to get them more motivated, because we need them particularly as it relates to the praedial larceny issue that we're facing. So, this, we recognise and we expect to see more support in terms of the response that we would get in that area.

On the matter of the sargassum, I listened to my dear friend Senator Andrew on the "Other Side" about sargassum. You see the thing about it, Deputy President, is that

we have a document in front of us from which we refer, and so we can only speak of what is before us, or what is exposed to us. So to say that something was done in sargassum, when I look at the line items in the budget, as I said yesterday, stand corrected, no, on Tuesday, that money was allocated, but I was seeing a set of zeros. I said it could have been an error, and so I trust that maybe those were corrections to the error, but the bottom line is that having those activities done. Were they done at zero dollars, or was there a cost associated with those? So still, notwithstanding the comments of my dear friend, the question is how much was spent on it.

Because you see, Deputy President, when you spend money, when you spend money, it means that you are contributing to the GDP. So by just holding back a lot of money and not spending it, we are also negatively affecting our GDP. I'm not a student of economics, but the fact that you spent on something, it's the goods and services produced in the country. So you may have an event, you may have to hire buses, you may have to pay for caterers, all of which contribute to the GDP.

So if we have EC$20 million unspent for the budget, and we think we're doing well, the GDP could have been maybe 2% higher, half a per cent higher, because we created more goods and services in the country. I want that to be noted. So let's spend the money on the activities, and that will contribute to recording the information properly.

I want to also speak on the issue of our dear Sister Francis on the issue of the sign languages because I know when I just got here this was a matter that was introduced and when we are in this Chamber sometimes you not seeing what is happening, and I'm not too sure if it's intermittent, but it's something that I fully endorse and it is a matter that I know I had some discussions with the Clerk from since I came here on this matter and it was highly commended on that matter. And so I'm not too sure if it's a budgetary issue or if it's a human issue, but I stand that we should ensure that we urge you, the Parliament staff, and the President, such that we can able to cater for this person. So I fully endorse that.

The issues of mental health and all of those challenges and so on, I know our dear Sister Thomas is working there, and we have to support those areas in all forms and

fashion. Because at the end of the day it affects the whole status of our country.

The two points I want to make as I wrap up, Deputy President, is one, the issue that Senator Lewis raised, particularly, in that Woodford area, if I have it right, because I know there is a petition going around on that matter with the environmental situation, and it's a matter that we should be concerned about, you know. The question is sometimes not taking action, and the appropriate action, you know. We need a hearing, and I'm aware I've been monitoring the situation, and I know a petition is being addressed, and if we have to take the petition to Parliament, then we will take it. We have taken before, and if we have to do that, we will do that because we cannot be saying one thing on one side and saying one thing on the other side, and I think that is what I'm hearing.

And, of course, the last thing I want to say, Deputy President, is the whole issue of cannabis. We need to see some more action going on there. There are a lot of inquiries. I meet the Rastas and so on that are involved, and they want to see action with other persons in a community, and they want to know what is happening.

So I think that we are far advanced, based on what we are hearing, and we look forward to having some action there so that people can know, you know, how to proceed in this regard, and, at the end of the day, we can plan better.

With this said, I want to thank you for the moment to speak in on this matters and I want to wish all farmers, fisherfolks, who are on the outside knowing now that the budget is available, we can able to share more information with you so you know what to expect from your ministries, from your Member of Parliament, so we can hold them accountable. In the next few sessions, I will pose some questions to know where we are with certain things and certain promises, so that we can monitor the feedback and not at the end the year seeing zeros. Thank you, Deputy President.

Mr. Deputy President (Sen. the Hon. Norland Cox): Thank you, Senator St. Clair.

Madam President: I thank the Deputy President, and I thank all those of you who

are left. Any other contributions towards the Adjournment? **(Inaudible comment by a Senator)** The Motion was already moved. Yes. I wanted to say something myself, and I'll be as brief as possible, leaving out many.

I join with Senator Claudette Joseph in, let me say, lamenting and being sad about the suicide of a 15-year-old girl. It is a very sad and regrettable development in our country and in our community among young women. This is women's month, so it has a particular sting for me, for all those things; the age of the child, the fact of suicide, time, and its occurrence, the fact that we do have in this country mental health systems in place. They may be nascent, but I joined with those who remind us that, and to remind the young people of this country, they could and should, whenever they can, reach out to anyone. There's always somebody who cares, there's always somebody who cares, you might have to go through 10 or 15 persons, but you'll find somebody. So please reach out, I think you can call any one of the Senators in this room, start with that. Call any one of us, and we just hope that we can do more to stem this very tragic health development.

Senator Seville Francis, we do have some in-place sign language, but it's difficult to implement it at times, which is why you're raising it. Due to the duration of our meetings, the persons who are trained also have responsibility elsewhere, so I think it's something that the staff of the Parliament will be called upon to implement sooner rather than later. Again, in women's month, we are happy that the Carriacou Five women have found a resolution to the situation, and we wish them well in the Pursuit of the rest of their careers.

Congratulations go to Blaka Dan, whom I really don't know; it's a new young phenomenon. So I'm looking forward to... Somebody who has threatened to take me to a youth concert, I hope this is one of them, because I want to congratulate the young man and get to know his music.

The passionate appeal on the part of Senator André Lewis for dignity and justice for all, I want to endorse that. I think that all of us are committed to that on both sides of the island. I call on the Government, the Government representatives here, to follow up

on that and see what is at stake here, what is happening or not happening, to allow any Grenadian to feel that he or she is not receiving justice, and whose dignity is not intact. I think this is not, from my reading, what the Government intends. So it ought to be looked into.

And there are some gaps that I think also, other kinds of issues relating to the budget, which I won't go into, but I think that we need more information, more timely information or analysis. While I'm on that, you know, to wrap up, I want to say that I, before I say that, let me continue on the theme of the International Women's Month and say that there are two women I would like to mention, maybe three.

First of all, to say happy birthday, Seville Francis, our sister in Parliament, happy birthday in the month of March to you. And it is said that greatness is in each of us, says the Prime Minister, I couldn't agree with him more, and that we are capable in Grenada, of greater greatness. And this morning, in citing the Prime Minister, one of the Senators gave the list. In fact, the presenter of the Budget Bill gave a list of all the great persons. If my memory serves me right, I didn't hear or don't remember any women, and I want to mention that at least one women who has been celebrated this month, a great cultural worker, Shirley Robinson, who was rightly celebrated **(applause)** by the cultural community of Grenada, Ms. Robinson hats off to you, congratulations and most of all thank you and a long fruitful life, not in pension poverty, but in pension enjoyment. Thank you for your service.

Senators, it's been a long two days, very different in various perspectives, various energies were brought to the analysis. Thank you for your cooperation, all of you, everyone, for making this debate meaningful, for staying within your limits, and for being of good humour, those who had to wait for extensions from your colleague.

When we had a conflict, I want to say that you displayed incredible conflict resolution skills. We do have a mechanism for it, which is the Standing Order, the guide and the prudence of the presiding officer, and the cooperation of the Senators, and I think they all came together this morning, if I may say so, and I want to thank the two young Senators for being as cooperative as they were.

Adjournment

I would have wished, if truth be told, I would have wished for a more vigorous or clear or loud or something in the retraction, but I want to thank Senator Charles for being gracious enough to indicate that she was retracting her statement and that she was brave enough to continue her perception. I want to thank Senator Francis for her extreme graciousness, both to defend her position as she should and to accept the gracious withdrawal.

Lastly, I think it must be said that we are all going in the same direction. The direction of travel for this Senate is outlined in the budget to build resilience, to rise up as a country, so Vision 75 could really be ours. You may not agree with the proponents, but I think the vision receives support from everyone here. And so the differences of detail, I call them should continue to be made, listened too, acted upon, so that you get the strongest outcome and implementation of this EC$2 billion budget because its people's money that is being put at the disposal of the managers of this state, and we trust that that direction of travel will take us where we want to go, both with what we already know and have a competence in, as well as where we can improve, with the input from the debate.

So it is been an important, very important, I remember in the years and you'll age me now, I remember the days of the Revolution, we went from EC$16 million to EC$32 million in our national budget, this was maybe for 45, at least 45 years ago, and we thought it was the most revolutionary thing to happen. I don't believe that anybody would have thought then about an EC$2 billion budget for Grenada. So we've come a long way, and a long good way by enlarge, and this is the moment, an inflexion moment for us that we have the ability to propose large and accomplish even larger.

Thank you all very much, and all those who are... And then for the month of March, I mentioned Shirley Robinson, and I also want to mention my neighbour, Mrs. Annie Bain, who turned 90 years old. Mrs. Annie Bain **(applause)**, happy birthday, congratulations. As you know, she is the widow of a former Member of Government, a former Parliamentarian, she's the mother of former Parliamentarian, Yolande Bain, and she herself is a well-known St. Andrew Social Development activist and businesswoman.

Many of the women of her age, her generation, gave unselfishly to the resilience that we enjoy now. They laid down the social parameters of caring for their own families and in the community. In that sense, Senator Gloria Thomas, you follow likewise in that tradition, a grand tradition, that has been laid for you. I want to specially thank you for taking up the social development baton that women in and out of the states have held from Cynthia Gairy, Waple Nedd, Nadia Benjamin, so many women who have served in that post, you can, but not succeed.

Thank you, everyone, for all that you're doing.

Question put and agreed to.

The Sitting of the Senate adjourned *sine die* at 8:05 p.m.

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